

Terrorism Turned Monstrous:
An Examination of Post-9/11 Science-Fiction-Horror Films
Adapted from Pre-9/11 Source Texts

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By
Farron Jesse Ager
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UNIVERSITY OF REGINA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
SUPERVISORY AND EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Farron Jesse Ager, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in English, has presented a thesis titled, ***Terrorism Turned Monstrous: An Examination of Post-9/11 Science-Fiction-Horror Films Adapted from Pre-9/11 Source Texts***, in an oral examination held on April 22, 2015. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner: *Dr. Kevin Wetmore, Loyola Marymount University

Supervisor: Dr. Nicholas Ruddick, Department of English

Committee Member: Dr. Marcel DeCoste, Department of English

Committee Member: Dr. Philippe Mather, Department of Film

Chair of Defense: Dr. Lee Ward, Department of Politics and International
Studies

*via Video Conference

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores three post-9/11 film adaptations, *War of the Worlds* (2005), *I Am Legend* (2007), and *The Mist* (2007), in an attempt to better understand societal influences on the adaptation process by examining the alterations that a literary adaptation prepared to go to film undergoes in order to suit a contemporary audience.

The ways in which we negotiate cultural trauma are not direct and it may take time and mediation in order for the trauma to be healed. This thesis argues that mediation of the cultural trauma associated with 9/11 is directly connected to Hollywood blockbuster science fiction and horror adaptations from pre-9/11 literary source texts. Adaptations offer stories often known by their audience, ensuring a comforting familiar narrative with a reassuring ending. Simultaneously, adaptations also introduce differences that make them likelier to appeal to contemporary audiences, such as updates, new characters, or modified endings. Beginning by examining imagery that evokes the memory of 9/11 and then comparing each adaptation's source text and its popular adaptation, this paper seeks to answer how post-9/11 film audiences affected and were affected by the adaptations they watched. No longer are narratives in these adaptations concerned with Social Darwinism, the effects of nuclear war, or technological hubris. In the years following 9/11, these three particular adaptations come to directly reflect major societal concerns: the recognition and negotiation of trauma and loss, the importance of maintaining hope, and the danger of abandoning hope too early.

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Introduction: Trauma and Adaptation of the Day that Changed the World

I will never forget what I was doing on September 11, 2001. I was in my home and preparing myself a bowl of cereal when I turned on the television, expecting to watch another episode of an early-morning science show. But instead, I saw frightened faces spliced with grainy images of the second plane hitting the World Trade Center with screams in the background. In my Grade 8 class, I remember everyone being glued to the television that the teacher had brought in. During the broadcast, we swapped stories about how we first found out. More often than not, our stories were similar: turning on the television, expecting to see familiar programming, and then being shaken awake by grainy footage. I know now that, just being on the cusp of becoming a teenager, I was too young to understand the full ramifications of the event as it unfolded. The one thing that I did realize, though, is that while 9/11 took place far away from me and my classmates, it hit everyone at home.

A few years later, I remember coming out of a theatre with a friend of mine, having just seen Steven Spielberg's adaptation *War of the Worlds* (2005). I was familiar with the H.G. Wells novel (1898) and had guessed correctly how the film was going to end. I remember my friend lambasting the film, calling it "US propaganda" among other things. At the time, it was hard to disagree with him, but I did, though I couldn't say why. Granted, the film is set mainly in the United States, with attacks on other countries limited to news broadcasts. Moreover, the film employs patriotic imagery, such as a Minuteman Statue, to suggest that the tide of the war is turning in humanity's favour. Yet, I felt there was much more to the film than what he might call American propaganda.

Not long after Spielberg's film, there was a significant rise in the number of Hollywood science fiction/horror films depicting global disaster and/or alien invasion. In the decade after the event that has come to be known as 9/11, we saw films such as Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *2012* (2009), Matt Reeves' *Cloverfield* (2008), Francis Lawrence's *I Am Legend* (2007), Frank Darabont's *The Mist* (2007), and M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening* (2008). *The Day After Tomorrow*, *War of the Worlds*, *I Am Legend*, and *2012* were among the top ten grossing films of their respective years and *The Mist* and *Cloverfield* garnered a cult following.

While some of the films mentioned are based on original screenplays, it is interesting to note that three of the most popular post-9/11 science fiction/horror films – *War of the Worlds*, *I Am Legend*, and *The Mist* – are all adaptations from well-known works of fiction written long before 9/11. This thesis explores the process of adapting pre-9/11 science fiction and horror texts into post-9/11 films. The texts I will examine are H.G. Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend* (1954), and Stephen King's novella "The Mist" (1980), and their respective adaptations by Spielberg, Lawrence, and Darabont. All three source texts concern an invasion of Earth by an alien force that kills indiscriminately. While published 103, 47, and 21 years respectively before September 11, 2001, each has been adapted, or, in the case of Wells and Matheson, readapted into film following the events of 9/11. Each adaptation takes the source text and reshapes it for a different medium and, given the post-9/11 context, for a different audience. To understand the prevalence and popularity of post-9/11 adaptations of pre-9/11 source texts, however, first one must explore the role of the Hollywood film industry in the mediation of cultural trauma.

Be it from crime, accident, war, natural, or manmade disasters, cultural trauma is something that must be continually acknowledged, reconciled, and overcome by every society if the society is to carry on. In understanding trauma, I believe it is best to begin with Slavoj Žižek, who, in his book, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), argues that in the days after September 11, our gazes were “transfixed by images of the plane hitting one of the WTC Towers” (11-12), forcing us to experience the shots ad nauseam. Footage of 9/11 haunted us, as news report after news report on television, online, and on paper showed its audience those two singular moments of the first plane hitting the WTC Towers and then the second one to indicate that it was no mere accident. We were shown the horror on people’s faces and heard the screams in the background when the planes hit. In the aftermath, we were shown interviews with firefighters, police officers, people who lost loved ones in the attack. The worst part of it was that there never seemed to be an end to the horror and, even though I was just entering my teen years on that fateful day, I remember people repeating ad nauseam that things would never be the same.

Sigmund Freud defines trauma as an event that has “completely shaken the foundations on which [individuals] have built their lives” (“Part Three”), not just an experience that wounds an individual on a physical level, but one that fundamentally changes how people may see themselves or their world. In building on Freud’s definition, Shelly Rambo writes that, for trauma and the traumatized, “the past does not remain in the past; a future is not imaginable” (108), and so it becomes very difficult for an individual to move on after a traumatic event. Richard Gray, in “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis” (2009), suggests that trauma is manifested as “an event the full horror of which is not and cannot be assimilated or

experienced fully at the time but only belatedly” (129), when the traumatic event is more firmly rooted in the past. The traumatic event experienced now becomes something emotionally paralyzing for an individual, as it is so horrific that it cannot be disregarded nor can it be remedied immediately, rather requiring a passage of time before it can be addressed and healed.

In looking at the traumatic nature of 9/11, Karen Randell, in “It Was Like a Movie: The Impossibility of Representation in Oliver Stone’s *World Trade Center*” (2010), claims that “the 9/11 event is a collective trauma, one in which we can all share, no matter whether we are a New Yorker or a world citizen” (142). As the events of 9/11 unfurled, the whole world, and not just the United States, watched in horror in real time. Individuals were glued to their televisions in their homes and places of business, experiencing the event collectively. I cannot claim that we, who watched on our televisions, experienced the same level of trauma as the individuals present at what would become Ground Zero, but I do think that collective cultural trauma is a valid description of 9/11. I find it appropriate to use the term ‘horror of togetherness,’ wherein the phenomenon is experienced is inherently collective, as everyone participated in watching the events of that day. Unlike those in downtown Manhattan, those who watched the event on television were in no immediate danger. Though not in fear for their lives, they experienced a trauma conforming to Freud’s, Gray’s, and Rambo’s definition, insofar as the frame of reference upon which they built their worlds was now shaken. When the planes hit the Twin Towers, the world suddenly realized that the USA, its most powerful nation, was no longer as safe as we once thought and its future was uncertain.

Laura Frost, in “Black Screens, Lost Bodies” (2011), writes, “for most people, 9/11 was so out of the range of typical experience that there was no clear framework in which it could be assimilated” (15). When listening to commentary from witnesses of the attacks on the World Trade Center, we find that many said that what they were experiencing was “like a movie” or “didn’t seem real” or, as Žižek suggests of the clouds of dust and collapsing towers, “a special effect which outdid all others” (11).

Assimilating the event of 9/11 into a framework of mental reference became a tremendously difficult process. For some, it seemed so implausible that hijacked planes could crash into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that they assumed what was happening was fictional – a movie. Clearly, at the time, for those people, identifying 9/11 as anything but a work of fiction was not possible. As in Gray’s definition of trauma, it was something they were unable to process until at least some time had passed. Randell examines this notion by noting that it took seven years from the end of World War I for Hollywood to release a combat film and thirteen years after the Vietnam War (144-45). She argues that this is “symptomatic of the cultural climate that exists after a national traumatic event and can also be understood in terms of the need for temporal space in which to assimilate its various traumas” (145). She suggests that audiences need at least ten years in which to process the trauma of 9/11 (144). But when sufficient time had passed after the initial event, how was this trauma dealt with?

The Mediation of Trauma through Hollywood Film

In examining trauma, we must also look at how the trauma experienced is mediated for the traumatized. The event was mediated to a worldwide audience through

live television broadcasts, but, if we are to believe that trauma is a mental wound that cannot completely be healed, at least initially, how can 9/11 eventually be remediated? Randell argues that 9/11 has “been repeatedly returned to – one could say neurotically returned to – not through explicit narrative but through a referentiality that allows its audience to assimilate events via mediated images, dialogues, and echoes of the attack” (145). Similarly, Gray suggests that “the way to tell a story that cannot be told is to tell it aslant, to approach it by circuitous means, almost by stealth” (136). If 9/11 is to be remediated for a collective audience, there must be evidence of this remediation present. As 9/11 was collectively experienced on television screens in homes, the remediation of trauma can happen on the very same screens. Frost notes the surge in filmic representations focusing on 9/11 narratives, and also that “heroic firefighters, collapsing buildings, gaping spectators, and black screens were the main tropes of mainstream representations of 9/11, and specifically the images that were substituted for human devastation” (37). She explains that very few actual images or footage of 9/11, save for the unforgettable scenes of planes crashing into the towers, were widely shown to the world at the time. Rather, many of the actual images depicting human fatality were quickly replaced by other, much less direct images: “the phenomenon of the ‘disappearing’ falling bodies – shockingly present one day and conjured away the next – and the ensuing confusion around their meaning echo the structure of trauma: an event not fully cognized in the moment, so that it must be returned to later” (20). It’s during this “later” that Hollywood studios start to produce science fiction/horror films with narratives that showed invasion, destruction of cities, and indiscriminate death.

This study will explore how the trauma of 9/11 was mediated by Hollywood for the traumatized audience. In looking at filmic representations of trauma, Frost notes that the post-9/11 sf/horror film “became much more psychological and internal, shifting to the more insidious and subtle dynamics of paranoia and dread” (35). Film theorist Siegfried Kracauer, in examining the relationship shared between a film and its audience, argues that feature films appeal to an anonymous multitude (5), and he draws the conclusion that “American audiences receive what Hollywood wants them to want; but in the long run public desires determine the nature of Hollywood films” (6). What Kracauer suggests is that audiences demand certain films from Hollywood and Hollywood subsequently obliges. Similarly, Randell suggests that Hollywood relies on “indicators of the cultural climate and consensual discourse around an event before they can commit to economic investment” (145), indicating to us that, in the years following 9/11, Hollywood had begun to release films that echo the memory of 9/11.

Of course, there have been films released in the post-9/11 that attempt to represent the events of 9/11 directly, such as Oliver Stone’s *World Trade Center* (2006) and Paul Greengrass’ *United 93* (2006). It is interesting that these films have been much less commercially successful than other post-9/11 films such as *War of the Worlds* and *I Am Legend*. *War of the Worlds* and *I Am Legend* grossed \$234,280,354 and \$256,393,010 domestically compared to *World Trade Center*’s \$70,278,893 and *United 93*’s \$31,567,134 (The Numbers). Clearly, films depicting the events of 9/11 were not nearly as commercially successful as science fiction/horror films depicting mass global destruction. I infer that the successful films did a better job of mediating the anxieties of the American audience.

After 9/11, audiences wanted films that helped mediate the trauma, and disaster and invasion science fiction/horror films were a way to assist in that mediation as they are already somewhat removed from reality. Many of the films, including *War of the Worlds*, *Cloverfield*, and *2012*, are displacement narratives, namely, narratives that place primary focus on the displacement and relocation of characters. For example, an alien invasion displaces humans and the invading species. It is interesting to note that the displacement narrative can cause a displacement on an emotional level as well. In examining the connection between displacement narratives and post-9/11 film, Randell suggests:

The production of displacement narratives is reminiscent of traumatic memory...where events and places that evoke memories can move one back in time to the moment of original trauma, in these terms Hollywood cinema becomes part of the process of memory retrieval, driving its audiences ever closer to an assimilation of a cultural trauma through a repetitive and fragmented production of the 9/11 story. (149)

Randell suggests that these displacement narratives can assist us in coming to terms with the event of trauma. Looking back at the box office numbers of *World Trade Center* and *United 93*, it is evident that audiences, by voting with their wallets, do not want literal reenactments of 9/11 on film. Rather, the film's commercial success may indicate that they want science fiction and horror fantastic narratives, fictional genres that are fundamentally different from realistic, historically accurate reenactments.

In addition to the prevalence of displacement narratives found in post-9/11 Hollywood science fiction/horror film, we also see an increase in specific tropes that

assist in the mediation between the trauma and the traumatized. Kevin Wetmore, in *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (2012) contends that the horror film genre was dramatically influenced and subsequently altered by the events of 9/11, citing films such as *Cloverfield* (2008), the *Saw* film series (2004-10), *War of the Worlds* (2005) and *The Mist* (2007) to support his claim that certain horror tropes became increasingly prevalent in post-9/11 film. Wetmore's noted tropes include the use of handheld cameras to suggest documentary realism, scenes involving panicked audiences, falling bodies, collapsing buildings (34), street fliers and photographs depicting missing loved ones (37), and hidden threats (e.g. infestation). In addition, the use of the science fiction/horror genre allows for the filmmaker to substitute monsters from the sf/horror menagerie for realistic threats such as terrorists. Wetmore contends that "by replacing terrorists as the scariest things we can think of, the threat of terrorism is reduced somewhat in the audience's minds" (44). Audiences cannot feel nearly as concerned about the threat of invasion if the displaced invaders are obviously fictional monsters as they can about the very real threat of terrorism. Yet the damage and destruction caused by the monsters on the silver screen is comparable to the real-life destruction wrought by terrorism on 9/11. In these films, 9/11 has now been displaced by a familiar horror from a long-existing popular film genre. Ironically, these alien horrors are more familiar – and more defeatable – than the real-life invaders on 9/11.

In looking back at the popular invasion films of the 2000s, it is important to note a key difference between the sf/horror films. In looking at the box office numbers, both *Cloverfield* and *The Happening* only grossed \$80,048,433 and \$64,506,874, respectively (The Numbers). While both fall into the same generic categories as *War of the Worlds*

and *I Am Legend* (sf/horror films), they fared much worse in terms of gross domestic profit. The main difference between these two sets of films, however, is that the former are based on original screenplays while the latter are filmic adaptations from source texts written pre-9/11, which leads us to investigate not just the post-9/11 film, but the post-9/11 film adaptation.

Post-9/11 Film Adaptations

So what role do fiction-to-film adaptations play in the post-9/11 filmic landscape? They are unlike films such as *World Trade Center* and *United 93* in that the events they depict are not direct representations of 9/11. And, yet, they are also unlike films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Cloverfield* in that they are based on source texts written long before 9/11 and which may have already been adapted to film.

Adaptations set themselves apart from other films by being based on stories that are often familiar to their audience. For example, Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, by its very title, aligns itself with its source text: H.G. Wells' classic sf novel *The War of the Worlds*. Yet, of course, Spielberg's film is not a faithful filmic representation of Wells' work. For example, the setting is completely changed, from late Victorian London to contemporary New Jersey, and the characters and settings are updated from their Victorian counterparts. But why were these changes made? I would like to propose that adaptations, by their very nature, are something akin to adaptations as they occur in biological evolution. The source text and its narrative are the foundation from which the species evolves. An adaptation helps its source text survive and, if successful, will generate its own progeny (i.e. further adaptations of the source text while also paying

respect to former adaptations). Adaptations enable the source text itself to continue to exist by remaining popular and culturally relevant. Of course, an adaptation is often based on a source text that is culturally familiar and culturally popular. Adaptations are usually made from existing works that have survived the test of time. This lends some credibility to the adaptation if it is based on a popular work, as the adaptation uses the longevity of its source text as a method of proving that the adaptation is a worthwhile endeavor.

One of the film adaptation's main strengths is that it is usually based on a familiar narrative. Familiarity is reassuring as well as comforting. The audience, when going to a film adaptation, understands that the work is based on a source text that has a reassuring ending. To further ease the audience's anxieties, adaptations are situated in pre-existing film genres, such as horror and science fiction, which, by their very nature, are formulaic. When we go to a horror film, we expect to be frightened just as we expect to be frightened when we read a horror novel, but we also expect the monster will be defeated at the end. Additionally, an author's reputation and fame may affect the viability of creating an adaptation. In these ways, adaptations of classic fiction are "pre-sold" properties that help producers more easily finance a film. That H.G. Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds* is a classic always in print gives it cultural prestige. Successful adaptations, ones that an audience will pay to see, allow an "old" story to be changed just enough to make it more likely to "survive" in the future. A successful adaptation gives an old story a new lease on life.

Of course, another of the key features of successful adaptations is that, while they resemble their source text, they can also introduce differences that make them likelier to

appeal to a contemporary audience. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), notes, “it can take very little time for context to change how a story is received. Not only what is (re)accentuated but importantly how a story can be (re)interpreted can alter radically” (142). A story written as recently as three decades ago may have to be drastically reinterpreted to serve the purposes of the present, especially when a major historical event has intervened that has shaped all subsequent events. We see this phenomenon particularly in *The War of the Worlds* and *I Am Legend*, as both were previously adapted to film before their post-9/11 reincarnations, the former in Byron Haskin’s Cold War era *The War of the Worlds* (1953) and the latter in Boris Sagal’s biological warfare-based *The Omega Man* (1971). Each of these films had already made changes to their source texts’ narratives to suit their contemporary audience’s film demands. It now becomes clear why Spielberg made the changes to his film: to suit his anxious post-9/11 collectively traumatized audience. By being able to make a connection between this audience and the familiar classic, Spielberg creates a commercially successful film.

The directors of adaptations feel that there is something worth preserving in these source texts to warrant a filmic adaptation. These narratives have passed the test of time and elements in them can still be seen as culturally relevant. In the case of *War of the Worlds*, *I Am Legend*, and *The Mist*, the threat of invasion from within and without is a still very real possibility. Each of the three film adaptations responds to this threat very differently. However, all three attempt to mediate the trauma experienced on 9/11 to the audience who bore collective witness to that trauma. Each adaptation takes the source text and reshapes it for a different audience. Consciously or otherwise, the directors are

mediating the events experienced and emotions felt during and after 9/11, but are simultaneously using familiar narratives to appeal to their audiences.

Chapter 1: “They’re Already Here”: Re-experiencing Trauma and Loss in Steven Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds* (2005)

Steven Spielberg’s film, *War of the Worlds*, the first film in this study of post-9/11 science fiction/horror adaptation, effectively tapped into what Thomas Renzi calls the paranoia that, in the post-9/11 era, “anyone living in the most typical of American homes and neighborhoods can be a potential terrorist” (80). Spielberg himself said that his film “reflects a lot of our post-9/11 fears but it also reflects another impulse that we really are human beings and we do come together to help each other survive, especially when we have a common enemy” (“Revisiting the Invasion”). What Spielberg does in his film is indigenize Wells’ novel for an American audience by setting it in modern New Jersey and creating characters that are more sympathetic to American audiences, much like his predecessor Byron Haskin did for his audience in the 1953 *The War of the Worlds*. By modernizing and relocating the narrative’s setting, Spielberg is able to insert imagery evocative of the memory of 9/11 in conjunction with the alien invasion and, through these reimaginings, he is able to explore different thematic issues from Wells, particularly issues that relate to those who experienced 9/11. Thus, in depicting an alien invasion on American soil, Spielberg presents to his viewers an arena in which to safely experience a virtual event similar to that experienced on and after September 11.

Released in 2005, *War of the Worlds* strongly resonated with the mainstream movie-going audience. With a budget of \$132,000,000, the film grossed \$234,280,354 domestically and \$357,465,178 internationally (*The Numbers*). The film stars Tom Cruise as the protagonist Ray Ferrier, a New Jerseyan deadbeat father with an estranged wife and two children: ten-year-old Rachel (Dakota Fanning) and teenager Robbie (Justin

Chatwin). He reluctantly takes charge of them while their mother visits her parents in Boston. However, the planet is soon under siege by interdimensional beings piloting colossal tripodal war machines. What follows is the battle for the future of humankind as seen through the eyes of Ray and his children as Ray struggles to reunite his children with their mother. Throughout the film, Spielberg presents images to his audience that specifically evoke the events of 9/11. These images include shots of panicked bystanders, people being covered in dust and ash, homemade placards advertising missing loved ones, and, perhaps most significantly, a plane crashing into a quiet suburban neighborhood.

Roughly 25 minutes into the film, after the main characters have been introduced and the first lightning strike of the invasion hits the ground, an inquisitive crowd gathers at the site of impact, a busy downtown Newark street. They hear a rumbling coming from the ground, which, much like an earthquake, begins to crumble the pavement at an increasing rate, damaging buildings. People are thrown down by the shockwaves. The first leg of the tripod emerges from the hole and nearly hits protagonist Ray. Slowly, the tripod emerges from the ground and towers over all other nearby buildings, shining a light down on the awestruck observers. The camera then cuts to the people, their necks craned upwards to look at the colossal machine, with the camera facing back down at them, allowing the viewer to see their faces and, particularly, their looks of panic. The next shot shows some of the crowd running towards the camera as the tripod emerges in the background, towering over the bystanders and buildings. The extra-diegetic score maintains an ominous beat of horns and percussive instruments, emphasizing to the audience that this emerging titan is a threat. The crowd are captivated and silenced by the

awesome sight of the tripod. The tripod blasts a loud, unearthly horn and begins to whirl. A man recording the event with his video camera is suddenly vaporized by a heat ray, his camera falling to the ground. The film then cuts to a close-up of the camera's still-running LCD monitor as more fleeing people are vaporized by the tripod's death ray. The reaction shots of crowds looking upwards are clearly evocative of the footage and photographs from Lower Manhattan on 9/11, as shocked people looked to the sky to see the unthinkable destruction of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center.

Shortly after the initial attack, Ray returns home and finds to his horror that he is covered in the ash of people who were vaporized by the death ray. Jason Vest, in "Future's End: Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005)" (2006) is quick to point out that "the parallel to the images of New York City residents covered in the dusty ash of the collapsed Twin Towers on 9/11 is unmistakable, and Ray reacts with the same horror that we saw etched across too many faces on that fateful day" (68). The grey ash that Ray is covered in recalls the dust cloud that enveloped New Yorkers near Ground Zero as the World Trade Center collapsed. We also see debris, such as clothing from the vaporized people, raining from the heavens. The look of fear etched across Ray Ferrier's face is reminiscent of the fear and horror experienced by those who saw the planes crash into the towers. Again, we see Spielberg evoking, by the reaction shots, the memories and experiences felt during 9/11 in his film. We see a similar evocation in the scene on the Hudson River ferry, via homemade placards advertising lost loved ones as Ray, his children, and many others try to get aboard the ferry for safe passage across the Hudson. These placards are similar to the ones posted in lower Manhattan after 9/11 by people missing loved ones who were in or around the towers during the attack. In the film, we

see the handmade signs spanning walls of a bridge, overlapping one another, embellished with capital letters and taped-on photographs in the desperate hope that one of the thousands of people fleeing via the ferry will know something about the missing persons. This scene lasts no more than ten seconds, yet it distinctly recalls the popular memory of homemade memorials made shortly after 9/11.

One of the starkest images that Spielberg uses in evoking the memory of 9/11 is when a Boeing 747 passenger plane crashes into the quiet upscale suburban neighborhood that Ray and his children are hiding in. Otherworldly lights flicker and flash as the trio panic and move from room to room in the basement of Ray's ex-wife's house. Rachel whispers "Are we still alive?" and then the audience is blinded by a white light that, in dissipating, slowly reveals Ray peering out one of the windows. He cautiously steps upstairs to find the burning remnants of a plane turbine in the living room with its blades still slowly rotating. As he steps outside, the camera zooms back to show Ray walking over debris while the plane's cockpit and fuselage lie on its side. An airliner has been taken down, presumably by the alien invaders, and it has crashed into an ordinary suburban neighborhood. Renzi argues: "The plane's crashing into a house where normalcy appears still intact is a reminder of 9-11, when two planes had crashed into the World Trade Center on a peaceful, ordinary day" (88). Of course, an image of a passenger jet crashing into a building, especially only four years after 9/11, will easily evoke the memory of the event. However, the memories and experiences that Spielberg evokes in this plane crash are not strictly limited to the events at Ground Zero in New York City. As we huddled around the television, watching the footage of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center towers, we imagined the planes crashing into our

homes. Spielberg has a plane crash literally into an ordinary house, symbolically bringing home the horror of 9/11. Suddenly, our home, the place we think of as most safe, is now potentially Ground Zero. The destruction and loss and horror experienced at the site of the Twin Towers are now personalized, as we are now forced to deal with this in our own living room.

In addition, Spielberg universalizes the horror of 9/11 through the use of representative characters and stereotypical locations. Ray Ferrier is meant to be an everyman character with whom the audience can identify. When we first meet Ray, we understand him as a deadbeat father. Initially, we do not identify with him until he starts to earn our respect. As a blue-collar crane operator, Ray uses his intelligence to survive his encounters with the invaders. The viewer is shown Ray's mechanical ability and quick thinking as he offers advice to a mechanic trying to fix a vehicle. Ray suggests changing a solenoid and the vehicle starts shortly afterwards as the family flees Newark. In spite of his parental irresponsibility, Ray is portrayed as a character who can get things done. He is one of the first people on-site during the attack in Newark. It is only through his ability to dodge obstacles and through buildings that he avoids being vaporized by the tripod's death ray. His knowhow and reactions are better than average, so he comes to both represent and stand outside the crowd. We also see a similar quality in Rachel. Dakota Fanning's remarkable performance as Rachel allows her to become an everychild. Spielberg uses Fanning's character to help illustrate the horror of 9/11 as it would be perceived by a child. The primary way Spielberg does this is to present frightening, violent, and gory imagery when Rachel is present. For example, on the drive to Boston, Rachel wanders off for a pee and, to her horror, finds a corpse floating downstream

which is quickly followed many others. This instance is one of the few times we actually see dead bodies on the screen and it is initially perceived by a child whose father has been trying to unsuccessfully shield her from the destruction surrounding her.

In addition to the reaction shots of the crowd, Spielberg's film also has reaction shots of Rachel, as she is exposed to these horrific phenomena. When Ray and the mechanic, Manny, are fighting over the van that Ray is using to escape Newark, Spielberg cuts to Rachel's nervous expression and whimpering when Ray threatens Manny's life. Rachel's reactions are indicative of how an average child would react to similar situations. Spielberg also universalizes the horror of 9/11 by his choice of setting, as Newark is only roughly eighteen kilometers from Ground Zero in New York. Indeed, an establishing shot of the Manhattan skyline is seen from Ray's crane and the Twin Towers are noticeably absent. Newark then becomes a setting that is close enough to Ground Zero that it evokes the memory and trauma of 9/11, but also far enough to have the terror of 9/11 brought home to the suburbs.

In these ways, Spielberg evokes the memory and trauma of 9/11 in his film. Spielberg is not the only filmmaker to have adapted and mediated H.G. Wells' novel. In order to understand why Spielberg makes the changes he does to the source text, namely the insertion of 9/11 imagery, we must look back to the source text and a previous notable adaptation: H.G. Wells' 1898 novel and Byron Haskin's 1953 film adaptation.

H.G. Wells' novel, *The War of the Worlds*, was published in 1898. Divided into two parts, *Book One: The Coming of the Martians* and *Book Two: The Earth under the Martians*, the novel is a first-person narrative of the experiences of an unnamed protagonist and his brother in the London area as Martians invade Earth. The Martians,

who are technologically superior to humans in every way, begin to conquer England with relative ease through the use of advanced military technology such as heat rays that burn people and the Black Smoke, a poison gas that exterminates people en masse. In his retrospective narrative, told after the defeat of the Martians, the unnamed protagonist tells how he struggled to rejoin his wife while seeing the Martians lay waste to the Home Counties. Since the narrative is recounted to the reader after the invasion has failed, we are given more information than would have been impossible had the narrative been delivered at the time of invasion. Renzi notes for us that this “enables the narrator to include information that was not available at the onset of the assault and was learned only after the crisis and reports events witnessed by his brother. Also, he occasionally inserts information provided by scientists” (86), such as hypotheses as to why the Martians invaded Earth. The information that the narrator provides for us regarding the Martians becomes extremely important later on when we reexamine the invaders in Spielberg’s adaptation.

The historical context of the late nineteenth century explains how and why Wells wrote his novel the way he did. Crystal Downing notes that before Wells even conceived the idea of Martians invading Earth, a novella called *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) written by Sir George Tomkyns Chesney, had been a best-seller. The novella was written just after the Prussian victory over France in the Franco-Prussian War and its narrative details the near-future invasion of Britain by an unnamed country, easily recognizable as Prussia. The popularity and monetary success of this alarmist work “led a plethora of publications about future wars and their gruesome consequences” (Downing 274). Wells wrote *The War of the Worlds* during the peak of this obsession with speculative works about future

invasions (274). The fear of London being invaded by a technologically superior assailant was already in the public's mind as an all-too-possible threat. While the United Kingdom was the leading imperial power of the time, its citizens had become fearful that they would be surpassed by the resurgent, unified Germany that emerged from the Franco-Prussian War. Wells capitalized on this fear and wrote *The War of the Worlds*. Of course, the human invaders are replaced with nonhuman ones and instead of Germany, the invaders come from Mars. But Wells was not interested in anti-German feeling – he uses the existing future war subgenre as a means to deliver what he feels are the most pressing issues for Late Victorian London.

If we look at why the Martians are invading Earth, the answer is provided in the first chapter of the novel: “our own warmer planet, green with vegetation and gray with water, with a cloudy atmosphere eloquent of fertility” (42). Wells’ narrator asserts that, since Mars is a much older planet than Earth, a standard hypothesis in Wells’ time (Lowell 244-47), it hosted an intelligent species, undoubtedly more advanced than ourselves, that knew it was facing its extinction and, therefore, looked to Earth, an environmentally rich planet, as a means of extending the life of their species. Consequently, the narrator has some sympathy with the Martians as colonialists: “before we judge of them too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals...but upon its own inferior races” (43). This humanization of the inhuman Martians is an interesting move by Wells. He provides for the reader an enemy that seems entirely hostile and loathsome. And yet, before we even get into the story of the Martian invasion, the narrator admonishes the reader to regard Martians with a modicum of understanding, for we (i.e. Wells’ contemporary Late

Victorians) are just as guilty as they are in destroying “inferior” species and races/ethnicities in order to further our own ends, such as gaining resources or accumulating wealth. It is through this destruction that Renzi suggests that Wells’ novel is “an allegorical tale in which the enemy is depicted as a cipher that could stand for any overpowering aggressor” (77).

As he shows how London, the greatest imperial centre of its time, is easily subdued by the evolutionarily and technologically superior Martians, Wells is able to touch upon themes pertinent to the 1890s, including the effects of colonialism and imperialism (Kerslake 85), natural selection (Williamson 189), and Social Darwinism (Parrinder 137). Martin Danahay outlines for us that Wells, a student of Thomas Henry Huxley, understood the impact of human intervention on the natural world, and decidedly “topples his Victorian contemporaries from the ‘top’ of the evolutionary hierarchy to shock them into realizing that the British Empire would not last forever” (11). Colonialism and imperialism were subjects of major debate during Wells’ time, as Britain had territorial possessions in many parts of the world.

However, despite these very prominent typical themes, there is one particular line that Wells’ narrator says that I believe has great relevance today and may help explain why Spielberg made the adaptation as he did. Wells’ narrator notes that the invasion “has robbed us of that serene confidence in the future which is the most fruitful source of decadence” (Wells 190), suggesting to the reader that British complacency was swept away by the invasion. This sentence seems fairly unemphatic, as the narrator ponders about the possibility of space travel and then his thoughts stray back to his family. Yet, in

it is, I would argue, one of the keys to understanding why Spielberg made his adaptation a century later for a post-9/11 audience.

Before we jump a hundred years, however, we must look at the earlier film adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* in order to get further insight into Spielberg's decisions. In 1953, Byron Haskin remediated Wells' novel for a very different audience from Wells'. Haskin's adaptation is only loosely based on the novel by H.G. Wells, despite retaining the entire title. Haskin's film was preceded by Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre's 1938 radio version, which was produced in the face of Nazi militaristic expansionism (Grist 69), just before the outbreak of World War II ten months later. Welles' dramatic radio adaptation is notorious for the panic it created in the United States. Adapting the text to his radio audience, Welles simulated a Martian invasion through the use of realistic sounding news bulletins without commercial breaks, leading the audience to believe that America was under attack.

The idea of a nation on the precipice of war in Welles' radio adaptation is something to keep in mind when discussing both Haskin's and Spielberg's adaptations, as Haskin's was filmed in the aftermath of World War II and at the onset of the Cold War, capitalizing on "the apocalyptic paranoia of the atomic age" (United States Library of Congress). Douglas Cowan remarks that Haskin's adaptation "reveals a number of cultural fears that plagued America in the years immediately following the Second World War: the fear of Soviet invasion, the dubious security of nuclear weaponry, the fragility of civilized behaviour in the face of apocalyptic threat" (1). The film opens with a montage depicting actual weapons and military vehicles, providing the viewer a potted history of how humanity's war materiel and weaponry has evolved technologically. We

are then given the Martian perspective, as an omniscient narrator provides a rationale why the aliens felt the specific need to conquer Earth and why every other planet in the solar system is unsuitable for life. The film's protagonist is Dr. Clayton Forrester (Gene Barry), an atomic scientist with the Manhattan Project, who finds himself in the middle of an interplanetary battle for the control of Earth.

Haskin's adaptation diverges significantly from Wells' novel. Adapting the film for his contemporary American audience, he relocates the Martian invasion from London to contemporary Los Angeles. Many of the characters in the film adaptation are completely new or greatly altered from Wells' work. We see events from the perspective of multiple individuals including Dr. Clayton Forrester, his love interest Sylvia Van Buren (Ann Robinson), her uncle Pastor Collins (Lewis Martin), as well as various military officials, scientists, a reporter, and civilians. In addition, Haskin's film details the Martian invasion of Earth as it happens, as opposed to being told retrospectively.

The grandest of these changes, and the most unambiguous and blatant alteration Haskin makes for his film, is the insertion of religious motifs in a "smarmy Christian subplot" (Downing 277) that opposes Wells' agnostic sentiment. While the ending of the film is similar to that of the novel, with the Martians defeated by terrestrial bacteria and humanity continuing to survive for another day, the emphasis regarding the explanation of the Martians' defeat has changed drastically. A panicked crowd flees to a church looking for sanctuary from the Martian invasion. Outside, they hear the destruction caused by the Martian war machines. The church begins to rumble and shake and those inside fear the house of God will be their tomb. However, soon after, the shaking stops and the crowd goes out to find the war machine slumped in the rubble. The hatch to the

machine opens and a Martian arm feebly reaches out. “It’s dead,” Forrester proclaims and the crowd looks to the sky as church bells ring in the background.

As Cowan notes, the film ends with “a ringing endorsement of humankind’s place in the universe secured by God’s blessing and protection” (2). A voiceover concludes the film by saying, “After all that men can do had failed, the Martians were destroyed and humanity was saved by the littlest of things, which God, in His wisdom, had put upon this Earth” (*The War of the Worlds*). While this speech is a loose paraphrase of a passage in the H.G. Wells’ novel (181-2), Haskin greatly alters its context to serve a dogmatic purpose. While the Martians are destroyed by the bacteria to which humans have adapted “by the toll of a billion deaths” (Wells 182), the final idea the voiceover narrator leaves us with is that the Martians’ defeat is the manifestation of the will of God. As Wetmore suggests, it was not so much bacteria that killed the Martians as “small town American family values, Christianity and the rock-jawed bravery of American men (and one woman)” (48).

In looking back at the final scene of Haskin’s film, we see this divine providence even more clearly. Renzi notes that “one alien machine’s destructive rays shatter the stained glass window of a church, and seconds later, machines begin to fail all over the world” (84). He adds, “killing humans is one thing, but in defiling God’s house, the aliens have gone too far and God punishes them” (84). We also see another testament to the Martians’ unkindness towards Christianity when one of the war machines kills Pastor Collins, who approaches them, reciting Psalm 23 with his Bible held high in a gesture of peace and goodwill. Christianity in Wells’ novel is given no such privilege as its main representative, the Curate, becomes a raving lunatic who is killed by the protagonist to

quiet him and prevent their discovery by the Martians (Wells 155-6). In Haskin's adaptation, there is no scene where the protagonist kills an individual to preserve his safety. The closest character to the Curate in Haskin's film is Pastor Collins, whose death is more that of a martyr than a lunatic. Haskin's decision to include providential religious motifs and iconography, while not technically changing the ending of the narrative, still alters the significance of the ending as well as how it would be received by his audience.

In examining the religious motifs of Haskin's film, Cowan claims that by completely inverting the function of religion in Wells' work, Haskin alters how his adaptation will be received. He concludes that the film reinforces "the intimate connection that existed in post-World War Two America between a strong faith and a determined resistance to communist aggression" (16). This idea of America standing strong against the godless Soviet menace was certainly a contemporary American issue following World War II. While the Martians are themselves not communists, there is a correlation between them and the relatively unscathed Soviets, as Renzi notes that "no damage is reported in Russia or its satellites" (78). As a result of this linkage, "Americans could leave the theatre secure in the knowledge that the manifest destiny of humanity was secure" (Cowan 16) as opposed to left wondering if they might be defeated should the Soviets invade. What this means is that, in essence, in Haskin's film, it was divine providence and God's favor that kept America safe from destruction, not our biological evolution and millennial acclimatization to Earth's environment.

It would appear that Haskin's adaptation was motivated not so much by Wells' Late Victorian ideas as by the threat in 1953 of a Soviet invasion. And yet, it is still based on Wells' novel, be it ever so loosely. However, Haskin's film changes to suit its

audience of the time. While the religious motifs in the film may seem contrived and implausible to an audience today, Haskin's American audience of the time genuinely believed that God would help keep them safe from any possible threat of invasion. The most likely threat of invasion in 1953, of course, would come from Soviet Russia. Haskin's decisions to reinterpret Wells' novel to produce a film for his contemporary audience helps us understand what motivates novel-to-film adaptations. Hutcheon writes, "when giving meaning and value to an adaptation as an adaptation, audiences operate in a context that includes their knowledge and their own interpretation of the adapted work" (111). Haskin understood that he would be able to gain the attention of his Cold War audience by "updating" Wells' already familiar story and creating for them a believable world that they could find themselves in. Spielberg understands that his audience will be affected by 9/11 and will carry their experiences with them to the theatre. Successful film adaptations, those that have been commercially successful and proven popular with audiences, depend upon awareness of the contemporary audience's desires and anxieties. If we follow the pattern of Haskin's alterations from the H.G. Wells novel, we can begin to see why Spielberg remediated his adaptation in the way that he did.

Wetmore divides critics of Spielberg's adaptation into two categories: those who see Spielberg exploiting the pain of 9/11 for shock value and those who see him appropriating 9/11 imagery in an attempt to "contain the trauma of 9/11" (48). One might view the evocative images that Spielberg inserts as bad taste – as disrespectful to the victims of 9/11. However, I suggest that, in evoking 9/11 imagery in *War of the Worlds*, Spielberg is attempting to contain and domesticate the trauma of 9/11 for his audience. His viewership, like Haskin's, is a product of its era, and, therefore, Spielberg remediates

the Wells novel to suit his 2005 audience. For that audience, it was terrorists, not Soviets, who threatened the American way of life. Instead of confronting the potential threat of nuclear war, Americans suddenly woke up to the reality that their native soil had been attacked by “aliens.” Instead of merely fearing a future invasion like Haskin’s audience in 1953, Americans in 2001 had actually experienced an attack on home soil in places so iconic in American culture. Unlike Haskin’s film, that implied that faith in God and resistance against Communism would win the day, Spielberg’s film must deal with the issue of how Americans recover from what they have already lost: their sense of security.

If we consider Wetmore’s suggestion that Spielberg is attempting to contain the trauma experienced on 9/11, we might conclude that Spielberg is attempting to do so via 9/11 imagery. Let us return to the scene of the first tripod attack in Newark and the man with the video camera being vaporized. Wetmore finds this scene particularly fascinating, as “no one needs to be filming, the events ultimately are filmed regardless” (79). In filming the video camera that is filming the tripod, Spielberg is directing his audience’s eyes to the monitor, even though it only reproduces the death and destruction around it. Our eyes are drawn to the event, but primarily they focus on the screen, on the filmed image, as means of “framing” or understanding the event. Wetmore says “we do not watch the same events play out behind the camera monitor in ‘real life’, we focus on the screen within the screen: we know what we are watching is mediated, and we prefer it to reality....The camera keeps us safe in a way that it did not keep its operator safe” (79). We find comfort in looking at the display on the camera as opposed to watching the real event surrounding the camera, because the horror is twice removed. Such an effect is not dissimilar to our memories of watching our TVs in horror as 9/11 unfurled in the comfort

of our homes. Those who watched 9/11 on their televisions were, in effect, once removed, as they were watching a television screen that was showing live footage of the event.

At the same time, though the danger depicted through the camera may not pose a real threat to the audience, it still evokes a sense of horror. The camera, capturing reality, adds authenticity to an otherwise incredible scene. In Spielberg's film, the almost unimaginable event that was the destruction of the Twin Towers was confirmed as real by the footage. The horrific event that the video camera is capturing makes the horror "real." Wetmore argues "by seeing the images on the screen, we know they are 'real' in a way that the special effects-driven actual film at that moment is not" (79). The video camera, in depicting the event, allows us simultaneously to feel safe, but disallows us from dismissing the events on the screen as incredible.

In this sense, Spielberg has "contained" 9/11 in his film. He presents horrific images evocative of 9/11 in film, and yet, we can view these evocations without feeling danger because we know it's "just a movie," much like when we view the tripod through the video camera. Whenever Spielberg evokes the memory of 9/11, he does so through a framed, mediated set of events. For example, while we may be horrified that Ray Ferrier is covered in ash, we are not in that position ourselves. When we see the placards depicting missing loved ones, we can feel sympathy without feeling threatened. We find ourselves in a similar position to when we huddled around the televisions on September 11. This is how Spielberg is able to begin to alleviate the audience's anxieties concerning the threat and trauma associated with 9/11. Through the process of adaptation, he is able

to guide his viewers through the trauma experienced on 9/11. The film offers us a contained environment to work through our traumatic experiences collectively.

Let us now look at the alien invaders in the film. The aliens are perhaps the most fascinating characters in Spielberg's film for a number of reasons. They are gruesome entities but at the same time they are familiar to us in some way. It's easier to make a monster monstrous than it is to humanize it. By their very nature, as beings not from Earth, the invaders have an otherworldly appearance with horizontally elongated heads, enormous eyes, etc., making them seem grotesque. In addition, the invaders have contempt for humanity and indiscriminately slaughter people, demonstrating a lack of compassion so the audience cannot sympathize with them.

Much like Wells' Martians, Spielberg's invaders spy on Earth with envious eyes and look to colonize our planet for its resources. While this colonial aim is never explicitly stated in the film, one of the more interesting ways it is implied is how the Martians fuel their war machines. Wetmore reminds us that "often forgotten in the novel is the fact that Wells's Martians literally consume humans, eating the bodies and drinking the blood. They are space vampires, of a sort. They consume us, destroy our lands and offer nothing in return" (47-48). Spielberg does not shy away from this point in his adaptation, as we see people being drained of their blood and one of the tripods collecting humans in a basket-like apparatus and consuming them, presumably to power the war machine. This monstrous practice of blood-sucking distances the invaders from us humans. However, the invaders' desire for human blood also implies that our blood isn't inimical to them. This is where Spielberg, much like Wells, suggests that these monstrous entities are, in a curious way, of one flesh with us. In this way, they are uncanny. Using

the German word *unheimlich*, meaning the opposite of what is familiar, Freud defines the word uncanny as “that class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (1-2). The uncanny is manifested in something that is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar to the individual, resulting in both an attraction to and repulsion from the uncanny object. The invaders, clearly monstrous and inhuman beings, require human blood for sustenance, suggesting that they are not entirely alien.

In looking at how the invaders are uncanny for Spielberg’s audience, I believe it is necessary to look at what the invaders represent. In Haskin’s film, we see the Martians standing for the impending Soviet menace that, for his audience, was ready to invade at any time. For Spielberg’s audience, the Cold War was over for more than a decade and the threat of communist invasion was not nearly as frightening a prospect as it was in 1953. Rather, Spielberg associates his invaders with something far more frightening to his audience – terrorists. The aliens, even though they are alluded to as Martians in the opening monologue, with an image of the red planet hanging in empty space, are not actually referred to as Martians anywhere in the film. Knowing full well that his twenty-first century audience would not believe in a Martian invasion, Spielberg makes his invaders of New York City come not from Mars, but from underground, as the tripods emerge from the earth to suggest that they have long been present on Earth and have only been biding their time. The alien invaders, who ride the lightning down to the machines, do not bring the tripods with them. Rather, the aliens utilize machines already buried in American soil. Renzi argues that “the buried machines symbolize dormant terrorist cells entrenched in the very foundations of our society, slumbering patiently for many years until they receive orders to galvanize their brethren and wreak who-knows-what kind of

havoc on our innocent and unsuspecting communities” (85). The invaders, in this sense, are much like the terrorists who hijacked Boeing 747s to crash into the Twin Towers because, as Wetmore notes, it is “not a purely external attack, instead employing what was already here” (48). In this way, Spielberg’s invaders are uncanny. They seem to be utterly alien to us, and yet, they use what was already here in order to conquer us.

Renzi claims that, after 9/11, a kind of paranoia existed that “anyone living in the most typical of American homes and neighborhoods can be a potential terrorist” (80). In this sense, the notion of terrorism itself becomes uncanny, as the post-9/11 American thought was that any person could be an enemy, including the ones who seem most familiar. Wetmore’s notions that “although clearly different from us, they are already here” (48) is perhaps the best way of understanding how the invaders are similar to terrorists, especially since the primary tagline in the posters for Spielberg’s film is “They’re Already Here” (*War of the Worlds*).

The question then arises to what extent are the invaders depicted, not only as terrorists, but as the Islamic fundamentalists who hijacked the passenger jets? In the scene in Newark, as the first tripod emerges from the ground and prepares to open fire on the crowd, the most prominent building in the vicinity of the emergence is a church with a steeple. The church easily crumbles away at the might of the rising tripod. In addition to fact that a church, a house of God, is destroyed, Spielberg would also appear to be acknowledging and refuting the emphasis of his predecessor’s adaptation. Haskin’s film ended just as a church was about to be destroyed, but Spielberg effectively starts his invasion with the razing of a house of God. Renzi also adds that the tripod appears to imitate a sound of flatulence as it rises, through the use of its ear-piecing horn and

appears to defecate on the site where the church stood, as earth that once covered the tripod falls from its groin region (84). Following this, Renzi concludes that “as symbols of terrorists, the extraterrestrials are alien not only in their ethnicity but also in their theology” (84).

Spielberg is in an interesting position when dealing with these allegorical terrorists. On the one hand, he is adapting a novel that, as suggested early by Renzi, could have any overpowering aggressor stand in for the Martians (77). Given the post-9/11 context, it makes sense for Spielberg to have his overpowering aggressors act more akin to terrorists, just as it was appropriate for Haskin to associate his aggressors with godless Soviets for his Cold War audience. Spielberg’s aliens cannot, however, be too similar to terrorists, lest they become actually threatening to the audience and risk reopening the wounds of 9/11. Spielberg successfully balances the level of threat that the invaders pose to the audience. While they behave much like the terrorists that perpetrated 9/11, the inhuman invaders are also fictional monsters that exist on the silver screen only. They cannot possibly be real. Because Spielberg’s adaptation is a film and not a real event, we know that the invaders cannot harm us, despite how cruel and unforgiving they appear on screen. In keeping this balance of horror and threat, Spielberg is able to present a frightening image, much like the 9/11 imagery, but in a manner that the audience can negotiate safely.

As with Haskin, we also see Spielberg tailoring the ending of his adaptation to soothe anxieties of his audience. In this case, rather than reaffirming the audience’s devout stoicism, Spielberg places a particular emphasis on the importance of family as a means of survival. The invaders, like the Martians in both Haskin and Wells, are defeated

by bacteria, but there is also another emphasis at play to which, while mentioned in Wells' novel, Spielberg gives considerable importance. Wells' protagonist, in escaping the invading Martians, is also seeking to reunite with his wife (Vest 68). The protagonist does reunite with his wife and the novel does end happily. He ends his account of the invasion by saying, "and strangest of all is it to hold my wife's hand again" (191). Renzi, in noting the strong connection Spielberg has with Wells regarding the search for missing family, argues, "[Ferrier's] quest to reunite his children with their mother in Boston parallels the quest of Wells's narrator striving to reunite with his wife, and the success of that mission, coming just after the first signs of the alien defeat, suggests something indomitable and persistent about the human spirit" (92). In this respect, Renzi applauds Spielberg's work in following Wells' narrative, saying that the film "remains faithful to the novel, which is also told from the viewpoint of a single, ordinary man caught up in the struggle for survival" (86).

The question then arises of how this familial focus is demonstrated in the adaptation. Primarily, it is portrayed through Ray Ferrier, who grows as a man and father. At the start, the relationship that Ray shares with his children is strained and his lackluster efforts to win their affection combined with his negligent attitude only earn him their resentment and frustration. However, as the film continues, we see Ray acting increasingly in a selfless manner. For example, when Ray and Rachel are captured by one of the tripods, Ray manages to save the captive humans who are awaiting processing by the invaders by detonating grenades as he is being sucked in by the tripod. His courageous act disables the tripod, allowing him, his daughter, and the rest of the captives to escape. While it may seem at first that he wishes to get his children to their mother so

he doesn't have to worry about them, we see him start to show a genuine concern for them.

An example of his new protectiveness is seen when he and Rachel are hiding in a basement with Harlan Ogilvy (Tim Robbins), a radical survivalist hell-bent on getting revenge on the invaders. Ogilvy, a father who lost his children to the invaders' attack, promises Rachel that should anything happen to her father, he would take care of her, a notion which both Rachel and Ray find disturbing. Shortly thereafter, Ogilvy suffers a mental breakdown from watching an invader drain a human for its blood and threatens the safety of Ray and Rachel through his manic ravings. Ray, to protect his child from being discovered, is forced to silence Ogilvy by killing him, just as Wells's protagonist killed the Curate. At the end of the film, we see the family reunited and Ray is cast in a much better light than he was at the beginning of the film. The family unit is restored, the children survive to see their mother and grandparents, all of whom are safe and sound in Boston, and Ray learns a lesson about the responsibilities of being a father. Wells' work also ends happily, but Spielberg's ending shows how maturity and responsibility can emerge from catastrophe. Ray, by growing as a father, earns his survival and his right to remain with his family.

So what does Spielberg, like Haskin before him, take from the ending of H.G. Wells' novel? Clearly, like Haskin, Spielberg doesn't emphasize the evolutionary perspective that is prominent in the novel. I believe that the ending serves two purposes for Spielberg's audience: to promote understanding why 9/11 came to pass, and to show that hope needs not die after a devastating tragedy. Vest says, "Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* shows that no amount of preparation can account for all the dangers of aggressive

colonization” (71), namely the aggressive ‘colonization’ of America through radical Islamists. When Spielberg himself was asked what he thought his film was about, he admitted that in making this film, the events of 9/11 were present in his mind: “My movie is more about the American refugee experience....My movie is what happens when Americans are put on the run...that is an image evocative for me and my generation post-9-11” (*Watch the Skies!*). Thus, Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds*, much like Wells’ original novel, becomes partly a tale of warning to be better prepared. Of 9/11, Renzi argues, “America’s defense floundered – in effect slept – at the moment we needed it most” (88). However, I would argue that Spielberg is suggesting that nothing could have prepared the US for 9/11. For a pre-9/11 audience, the idea of an invasion from within (i.e. from terrorist cells in America) was an unfathomable concept. Of course, acts of terrorism had been committed in the United States before, e.g., the Oklahoma City bombing, but the destruction and devastation wrought by these events pale in comparison to 9/11. Only when 9/11 happened did the possibility become a stark and sobering reality. Much like Wells’ narrator’s Britain, post-9/11 America has been robbed of its serene confidence in its future.

In looking at the hopeful note on which the film ends, Renzi suggests “this ending, contrived as it seems, hints that our former way of life is not utterly destroyed” (91). The triumph of Ray and his children reaching their destination “represents a return to the way of life that Americans knew before they were displaced by war. With renewed hope and communal effort, people can resurrect everything they once had” (91). Hope is alive and people will continue to carry on after the tragedy is gone and but a memory. This happy ending with the reunification of the family after the tragedy allows the

audience to understand that even while 9/11 was a horrific event in American history, they will be able to carry on from it.

One should note, though, that Spielberg's family isn't completely restored, as Ray and his ex-wife do not reconcile their differences and return to being a nuclear family. Unlike Wells' protagonist, whose main desire throughout the novel is to see his wife, Ray has absolutely no intention of reuniting with his ex-wife. However, he does attempt to find her so his children will be reunited with their mother. This lack of romance or spousal connection in Spielberg's work is interesting to note. It would suggest that any sort of non-familial, including ex-spousal, relationships have no place during the end of the world, or, more specifically, the immediate post-9/11 world. However, everyone in the family survives and regains security. In tailoring his ending in this fashion, Spielberg does not make promises to his audience that everything will return to what it was before the invasion, but does promise that hope will carry in spite of catastrophe.

In ending his adaptation, Spielberg allows his audience to safely negotiate the events of 9/11 in his film. Contemporizing and indigenizing Wells' narrative by relocating it to New Jersey, Spielberg is then able to insert imagery evocative of the memory of 9/11. Yet, this imagery is not meant to simply to terrorize his audience. Rather, Spielberg "gives us images of terror in order to transcend them" (Wetmore 50). While the evocations of 9/11 in the film can certainly be frightening, we understand that they are not directly threatening to us, who are in the movie theatre or watching it on a television. The 9/11 imagery in Spielberg's film, mediated and framed by the screen, enables us to explore the trauma of 9/11 while at the same time not reopening the wound. We then become able to explore the film's thematic issues as they relate to 9/11 and work

through them. Once we are able to confront the trauma of 9/11 in this manner, we are in a position to actually begin healing the trauma. Spielberg is not matching Wells' anticolonial stance by having a superior nation invade another. Rather, Spielberg uses the familiar narrative to help his audience understand that they have the capacity to move on, as is shown by his ending's emphasis on the importance of family ties, for if these hold firm, "neither do men live nor die in vain."

Chapter 2: “The Last Man on Earth Is Not Alone”: The Promise of Hope in Francis Lawrence’s *I Am Legend* (2007)

Francis Lawrence’s *I Am Legend* (2007) was adapted from Richard Matheson’s horror novel of the same name (1954). It was the third adaptation of this work, following Ubaldo Ragona’s *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), starring Vincent Price, and Boris Sagal’s *The Omega Man* (1971), starring Charlton Heston. *The Last Man on Earth* was generally regarded as having a “poverty-stricken budget” (Lambie) and was received quite poorly (Biodrowski) while *The Omega Man* cemented itself a small reputation as a cult classic (Susman). So *I Am Legend* far outshone previous adaptations. The film, with a budget of \$150,000,000, earned \$256,393,010 domestically and \$329,017,042 internationally (*The Numbers*) and, as of August 2014, is still within the top 100 all-time highest grossing films domestically and worldwide (*Box Office Mojo*).

On working on this film, Akiva Goldsman, a writer/producer, remarks that he “started rethinking *I Am Legend*, trying to keep the fundamentals of the story and at the same time doing some drastic surgery like moving it to New York” (“The Story”). Other alterations, including changing the location of the story, adding flashbacks of panicked crowds, and altering the ending, distance *I Am Legend* from its source text even further than its two previous adaptations. I would argue that in performing this surgery, the film radically alters Matheson’s original intent. Yet, in making these changes, the film also becomes able to explore themes that resonate better with its contemporary audience. Borrowing elements from its two previous adaptations as well as the source text, Lawrence’s *I Am Legend* updates Matheson’s narrative for the post-9/11 audience, similar to Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds*, while still attempting to remain rooted in the

novel's theme of the possibility of global warfare and the mass extinction of humanity. As did Spielberg, Lawrence evokes the memory of 9/11 by updating and relocating its setting, but also through reimagining the origin of the viral outbreak and flashbacks of in-crisis New York. Both of Lawrence's filmic predecessors, Ragona's *The Last Man on Earth* and Sagal's *The Omega Man*, attempted to modernize and indigenize Matheson's narrative for their respective audiences and Lawrence is no different. However, Lawrence's film is unique among these adaptations in that its ending faced many cuts and re-edits before shown in theatres until the message of the first version of the film was completely changed. These changes, which originate from the film's poor reception by a test audience, completely reversed the film's meaning.

The film stars Will Smith as military virologist Lieutenant Colonel Robert Neville. After New York has been struck by an epidemic caused by the accidental release of a genetically engineered variant of the measles virus, Neville finds himself to be the last human being in the city. Infected survivors have become predatory beings called "Dark Seekers," vampiric/undead creatures emerging at dusk to hunt Neville. As in Spielberg's film, what follows is a battle for the future of humankind. However, what is at stake is a fair bit different from in *War of the Worlds*. Whereas Spielberg's film focuses on what we may lose, Lawrence's film concerns itself with how to protect the remnants. Unlike the Spielberg adaptation, there are no shots in this film of the destruction of the New York landscape, such as buildings and bridges collapsing. Rather, the film is set three years after the epidemic and evacuation of the city, with abandoned overgrown buildings constituting much of the landscape.

Like the Spielberg adaptation before it, *I Am Legend* incorporates a variety of 9/11 imagery throughout its 100-minute theatrical running time. However, the imagery is not nearly as graphically obvious as a commercial airliner crashing into a suburban neighborhood. Rather, Lawrence's film alludes to 9/11 through three key tropes: framing pre-virus Manhattan via a television screen; flashbacks that depict Manhattan in crisis; and empty and haunting post-virus Manhattan.

Immediately after the footage promoting the production companies, we are confronted with an image of a television screen, on which a news anchor interviews a doctor. The guest, Dr. Alice Krippin (Emma Thompson), proclaims that she has genetically modified the measles virus as a 100% effective cure for cancer. In this scene, the viewer may notice that, although the film is a widescreen theatrical feature with a 16:9 aspect ratio, it starts off at a condensed 4:3 ratio, giving a TV-style image that only takes up a fraction of the available screen. This image within an image hearkens back to the scene in *War of the Worlds*, in which an abandoned video camera, capturing the destruction of a New Jersey street on its LCD screen, is presented to the viewer as the central object in frame. Now again, we see a screen on screen.

However, in *I Am Legend*, the surrounding destruction is not immediately apparent. Ironically, it is only after this scene, when we are introduced to the abandoned and overgrown Manhattan landscape three years later that we understand that what we saw in the television interview with Dr. Krippin was in fact the prologue to the inadvertent near-eradication of the human species by the Krippin Virus. Claire Sisco King, in *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema* (2011), points out, "the reporter's naïve optimism recalls constructions of the nation before 9/11 – a nation

unaware of imminent tragedy” (146). At no point in this interview does Krippin express uncertainty regarding her supposed cure, as neither she nor the news reporter understand what biological disaster awaits them. We understand the scene to represent scientific hubris awaiting its nemesis.

The way in which information is being presented to the viewer in this scene is also of note. As Dr. Krippin is explaining how her genetically modified virus acts as a cure rather than a malady, she explains the process in layman’s terms: “if you can imagine your body as a highway and you picture the virus as a very fast car being driven by a very bad man, imagine the damage that the car could cause. Then if you replace that man with a cop, the picture changes.” This way of explaining a rather complicated process in a way that is accessible to the common person demonstrates Dr. Krippin’s desire to make this information easily available to the public by explaining it free from medical jargon on television, a public medium. The information and the means by which it is delivered demonstrate its intended audience: anyone with access to a television.

In examining this scene, Sisco King argues that the reason behind this decision is to introduce the “fatally mistaken predictions about KV’s medical promise through the frame of television” so as to reference the “cultural memory of 9/11 as a hypermediated event whose impacts were intensified by its mediated coverage” (146). She suggests that it “critiques the role that television news plays in shaping public opinion and policy, echoing widespread discourse about the impact of mediated images as traumatizing to spectators” (147). This scene not only presents to us essential backstory, but also mediates it to us in a way with which we can easily identify: through a television screen. The information presented to us has been mediated and only then becomes disseminated

to us. We are not shown the destruction and abandonment of Manhattan directly. Rather, we receive only a foreshadowing mediation through the television. Additionally, we are cast in the role of distanced viewers, unable to intervene in a calamitous decision. The shot immediately following the interview with Krippin reinforces this notion, as the viewer is jarringly and directly shown an unfamiliar overgrown Manhattan landscape.

The most prominent 9/11-style imagery in the film is in the flashbacks Dr. Neville experiences. The first flashback, approximately thirteen minutes into the film, shows a Christmastime New York three years earlier. Neville, who meets up with his wife and daughter, rushes them to a departure point because Manhattan Island will be sealed off shortly. Flashing police lights reflect off the characters' faces as we learn that the Krippin virus has not become the cure that was expected of it. When his wife suggests that he can do his research for the cure elsewhere, Robert Neville firmly proclaims that he cannot leave, stating, "Ground Zero. This is my site." This direct reference to Ground Zero suggests that Manhattan is the primary site of impact for the Krippin virus – the site where the world first changed. Sisco King argues that the emphasis on New York City and Ground Zero as "sites (and sights) of great loss reinforces the tendency of 9/11 trauma discourse to mark these places as special and to commemorate their devastation as more significant (more traumatic) than other catastrophic events" (151). Before we are given more context about Manhattan in crisis in the film, the conversation is interrupted by an infected human slamming against the Nevilles' car window.

The next flashback is about 39 minutes into the film. Neville, his wife, and child are heading on foot to the evacuation site. Helicopters whirr overhead and masses of people gather in the streets, as the Nevilles push towards the evacuation site. A military

barricade blocks most people in the crowd from reaching the helicopter. As the Nevilles cross the barricade, Robert looks back to see a mother with tears streaming down from her eyes, pleading with him to take her daughter in a vain attempt to save her life. Neville forces himself to look away as he carries his own daughter to the helicopter. As he waves goodbye to his family, the flashback abruptly ends. The hordes of people crowding on the Manhattan streets as well as the distraught mother demonstrate similar emotions and reactions to those experienced and witnessed shortly after the planes crashed into the Twin Towers.

The third and final flashback occurs at 63 minutes into the film and continues immediately from the episode in the second flashback. Neville, waving goodbye to his family, sees them take off in a helicopter just as government-sanctioned missiles destroy bridges into Manhattan, effectively cutting the island off from the mainland. Amidst the panic, a neighboring shuttle pilot tries to shake off people clinging to his helicopter, forcing it out of control. The flashback ends just before the wayward helicopter crashes into another. Just before they are about to crash, there is a cut to Neville's eyes, opening from unconsciousness. The imagery of an aircraft crashing, destroying Neville's loved ones before his eyes, can easily be seen as reminiscent of 9/11, six years earlier. Sisco King suggests that Neville's flashbacks "imply that his trauma relates not only to the large-scale catastrophe that began at 'Ground Zero' but also to personal loss" (150). The trauma Neville recollects not only shows a city in turmoil, as on 9/11, but also a man in turmoil, who has just lost his family to the catastrophe. There is both a general and intimate sense of loss. Additionally, this flashback itself is traumatic in nature. Despite there being three years since the tragedy of losing his family, Neville's memories return

to that particular moment, suggesting that he is unable to alleviate the trauma experienced on that day.

Finally, the images of an abandoned New York City evoke the memory of 9/11. Goldsman describes when streets were deliberately emptied to allow shooting of *I Am Legend*, there would be bystanders who would be “horribly disturbed” because it reminded them of how quiet and empty the streets of Manhattan got after 9/11 (Ulaby). Of course, this phenomenon is not unique to 9/11, but it is certainly the most recent one in the audience’s mind at the time of filming. Sisco King also expounds on these scenes’ connection to the event of 9/11, arguing that the mise-en-scène frequently features the dilapidated and uninhabited downtown Manhattan skyline, including buildings marked with “red biohazard symbols that appear lacerated and bleeding” (145). She concludes that these images “summon memories of the hours, days, and weeks after 9/11 in which everyday life was radically suspended and the landscape was irrevocably changed” (146).

Through these catastrophic images, Lawrence evokes the memory and trauma of 9/11 in his film. But why does Lawrence evoke this memory and trauma? As we saw with *War of the Worlds*, Lawrence is not the only filmmaker to adapt and remediate Matheson’s novel. In order to understand why Lawrence makes such changes he does to the source text, particularly by the insertion of 9/11 imagery, we must look back to Richard Matheson’s 1954 novel and its two earlier adaptations, Ragona’s (1964) and Sagal’s (1971).

The first-person protagonist of Richard Matheson’s novel, *I Am Legend* (1954), is Robert Neville, the apparent sole survivor of a pandemic whose symptoms resemble vampirism. The pandemic, the consequence of an unnamed war, was spread by dust

storms in the cities and an explosion in the mosquito population. Based in Los Angeles, Neville attempts to comprehend, research, and possibly cure the disease, to which he is immune. At the same time, however, Neville also makes the effort to kill errant infected victims, whose symptoms strongly resemble vampirism.

Matheson deliberately does not tell readers what exactly caused the infection, leaving readers to speculate its origins. In one of Neville's flashbacks, he and his wife Virginia are talking at breakfast. Finding a mosquito in the house prompts them to think about taking better precautions, as Virginia exclaims, "they carry diseases" (55). Neville suggests that the mosquitoes may be the product of mutation caused by what Virginia describes as "bombings" (56), which are also the apparent reason for the dust storms that are plaguing the area. Later on, Neville realizes that flies and mosquitoes were the vector of the infection, but it was most likely bacteria that reanimated the corpses and turned the living into vampires (82). Neville also attributes his immunity to his being stationed in Panama during the war. He mentions being bitten by a vampire bat and deduces that the bat must have previously acquired a vampiris germ which it then passed on to Neville by drinking his blood. The germ, being weakened by the bat's immune system, made Neville terribly ill but did not kill him. Subsequently, his body developed immunity to the vampiric disease (144).

The vampires of Matheson's novel appear and behave very differently from those in Lawrence's adaptation. As Neville discovers, the vampiris germ not only infects the living, turning them into vampires, but also reanimates the dead. The living vampires appear to be more articulate than their dead counterparts. Indeed, when Ruth, a vampire disguised as human to earn Neville's trust, betrays him, she tells him that her group, the

living vampires, are hunting the reanimated ones, saying “their brains are impaired, they exist for only one purpose. They have to be destroyed” (166).

In Matheson’s novel, Robert Neville is a blue-collar worker of low social status. In one of his flashbacks, he mentions that he worked in a plant with his neighbor Ben Cortman. However, in each major film adaptation thereafter, Neville is affiliated with the military or medicine or both. In his attempt to figure out what works and what doesn’t work against the vampires (e.g. whether only the traditional garlic repels them, or whether onions might serve as an adequate substitute), Neville must acquire knowledge from books and effectively teach himself scientific principles to try to keep the vampires at bay.

Additionally, we find that over the course of the narrative, Neville cannot let go of his past, and becomes socially maladjusted. Early in the novel, Neville finds himself unable to re-label his dead daughter’s room as the larder however many times he tries (31). Many times as well, Neville finds himself thinking of his wife, Virginia, whom he had to mercy-kill due to the infection. At one point, all he can do is “sob like a lost, frightened child” his wife’s name (47). In addition, we also see that social isolation causes him to lust after the vampire women, whom he describes as “lustful, bloodthirsty, naked...flaunting their hot bodies at him” (33), even though their existence threatens his life.

The ending of Matheson’s novel comes with a startling revelation. As Neville is awaiting his execution at the hands of the vampires, he realizes that humanity is indeed gone, lost to the new race born of the infection. As the last remnant of that old humanity, he is now a legendary figure to this new race: to them a monstrous entity that hunts them

while they sleep. He announces to the readers, “A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever. I am legend” (Matheson 170). It is this final sentence that echoes the title of the novel.

One of Matheson’s concerns as he wrote his novel was what might happen if nuclear technologies went awry. The bombings that create the plague help to solidify this idea. Additionally, one of the key ideas that Matheson wanted to explore in the novel appears to be evident in the ending. Neville, the last human remaining, may see himself as a hero, but he is far from heroic. Hantke argues “Monstrosity, as Matheson puts it, is not a matter of appearance or actions; it is a matter of being the only one of one’s kind. Two of the central themes of fifties culture resonate in this statement – conformity and the plight of the outsider” (178). The objectivity of heroism is called into question when Neville is informed that the vampires have created a new society. Once an embodiment of the human norm at the beginning of the novel and then a minority of one at the end, Neville, perceived as heroic by the reader, is condemned and demonized by Ruth and the new society.

Matheson’s novel also deals with one interesting theme that adaptations sometimes ignore entirely. In it, three divisions of humanity appear: Neville as the last survivor; the formerly dead vampires that have been reanimated; and the living vampires, who are more articulate than their undead cousins. With the revelation of the existence of the third faction in the novel, the living vampires, Neville comes to understand his adversarial stance only further seals his fate of being perceived and hunted as a ruthless monster. His antiquated way of thinking, that vampires are monsters, causes him to murder countless living vampires, ones that are capable of more than just basic thought

and speech. What we will see in the three adaptations of this novel are directors who dramatize this third group, the living vampires, to help demonstrate the reasons why they made the changes they did for their works.

The Last Man on Earth (1964), directed by Ubaldo Ragona, was the first cinematic adaptation of Matheson's novel. Shot in black and white, the film stars Vincent Price as Dr. Robert Morgan, who lives in a world ravaged by plague. Much as in Matheson's novel, the infected of *The Last Man on Earth* have been turned into undead/vampiric creatures that, like the vampires of European tradition, cannot stand sunlight and are repelled by garlic. Commercially, the film fared poorly in comparison to Sagal's and Lawrence's adaptations and has not been regarded as a particularly well-made film (Biodrowski).

Ragona's film is, however, the most faithful to Matheson's novel. With a screenplay partially written by Matheson, this adaptation retained many of the elements found in the novel. The film changes Neville's name to Dr. Robert Morgan (he is elevated to medical research), and offers vague explanations for the source and spread of the infection (it is called Europe's Disease and is apparently windborne). Like Matheson's Neville, Morgan remains very much rooted in the past. From watching home movies of his family at the circus, to returning to the church where his wife Virginia is entombed, Morgan, much like his predecessor Neville, seeks to maintain his routine and remains set in his old ways. In addition, Morgan as a character is very much invested in reason and logic. We see this in flashbacks of him and his colleagues working in the lab in an attempt to find a cure for the disease, but also as he does his daily rounds. When he finds barrels of garlic, he only takes what he needs and leaves the rest behind. When

looking for mirrors at a store, he grabs the plain, lightweight ones as opposed to the mirrors with ornate, heavy frames. At one point in the film, he even chastises himself for becoming angry, saying that anger will lead him to his death.

Ragona's vampires are also relatively faithful to Matheson's novel. There are both divisions of vampires: the undead, zombie-like ones that regularly assault Morgan's compound with sticks and stones, and the living vampires, who are able to operate machinery and proceed to hunt Morgan down. Morgan, unable to distinguish the differences as they sleep, mercilessly stakes both kinds, earning his legendary status from the living vampires, much like Neville does in Matheson's novel. As in the novel, Morgan's inability to identify the "third division" of the living vampires leads to his doom at their hands.

Yet, *The Last Man on Earth* ends somewhat differently from Matheson's novel. After being mortally wounded in a gunfight with the creatures, Morgan retreats to a church, where he is impaled by the creatures on the altar. As he dies, Morgan denounces the creatures as "freaks," and proclaims "I'm a man. The last man!" Then he dies saying, "They were afraid of me." Ragona's ending proves interesting in that, approximately seventy minutes into the film, Morgan, comes to understand the monster he has become in indiscriminately hunting vampires. However, there still remain twenty minutes of the film in which Morgan is hunted down by the living vampires. Despite what is revealed to him, Morgan dies denouncing the vampires as freaks and monsters. He does not identify with them or their new version of humanity. As he dies, he remains convinced that humanity has truly died out and now there is no hope of redemption. In a *Twilight Zone*-style twist ending, complete with synthesizer music, Ruth, a living vampire who garnered

Morgan's trust and told him of the new society, allays the concerns of her new family, saying that they are finally safe from Morgan the menace.

In examining the context in which the film was produced, Steffen Hantke points out that "One of the key images in *The Last Man on Earth* is a vast pit where the military disposes of the dead; Neville...continues this practice, dumping the bodies of those infected that he himself has tracked and killed" (184). He suggests that the pit is "strongly reminiscent of Holocaust imagery, retrieved, presumably, as a response to Cold War anxieties about nuclear disaster" (184). Europe's Disease is viewed as something utterly foreign by Morgan and his fellow American scientists and its alien-ness is all we learn about it. Even as Morgan dies at the hands of the products of the foreign disease, he refuses to compromise his mentality, denouncing them as freaks with his last words.

In the DVD's special feature "Richard Matheson Storyteller: *The Last Man on Earth*," Matheson explains that, while he wrote the initial screenplay, he and the directors found themselves under an increasing amount of pressure from the British censors. In response, Ragona helped to partially re-write the script in order to gain their seal of approval. Matheson, however, was unhappy with the final product and so adopted the pseudonym "Logan Swanson" in the credits. This action suggests that he did not feel that the final film, while based on his novel and using elements of his screenplay, was his work and that the changes made to the script distorted what Matheson understood as his story. The concern regarding nuclear warfare is still present during the time *The Last Man* was shot and produced, as it was in Matheson's time. However, in Morgan's absolute refusal to recognize that he is a relic of a long dead past, the film comments on the adversary mentality of the Cold War, when antagonism between power blocs may

lead to humanity's annihilation. While Morgan retains his human form, he has lost his humanity. Unable to adapt to the new society and, in fact, distancing himself from the society, he unwittingly embraces his and humanity's extinction.

Boris Sagal's *The Omega Man* (1971) stars Charlton Heston as US Army Colonel Robert Neville, M.D. While most who succumb to the infection die, Neville injects himself with an experimental vaccine to become immune. However, the plague's surviving victims, a cult of nocturnal albino mutants known as "The Family," are seeking to destroy all modern technology because they blame science as the instrument of humanity's downfall. Believing himself to be the sole survivor of the plague, Neville spends his days hunting down members of The Family in a vain effort to end their threat and spends his nights in his fortified apartment in Los Angeles.

This adaptation differs greatly from the novel. Matheson's factory worker Neville is now a Colonel with a medical degree. The vampires have been traded for albino luddite mutants. The appearance of other survivors besides Neville also demonstrates how the adaptation has diverged from the novel. As a result, the adaptation has a very different message for its 1970s audience.

Interestingly enough, whereas the origin of the infection is ambiguous in Matheson's novel, Sagal's adaptation directly tells its viewers that the infection was the result of biological warfare, namely, "bacilli-carrying missiles" exchanged between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. A news report details the plague while we are shown a montage of people dying or already dead on sidewalks, homes, and in crashed cars. The news anchor's voice proclaims, "Whether a state of war between China and Russia still exists is not important any longer. Our fellow countrymen are dying, the

very foundations of civilization are beginning to crumble under the dread assault of that horror long feared: germ warfare.” Showing flashbacks of war and missiles, Sagal’s adaptation makes no attempt to hide the concerns of his audience in his adaptation.

One of the other major changes Sagal makes to his film is in the nature of the monsters assailing Neville. Gone are the traditional European-style vampires who are repelled by garlic and crucifixes. Instead, Sagal gives us *The Family*, a cult of albino mutants whose sole mission is to destroy anything that remotely resembles modern technology. Obviously, Neville, as a technocratic soldier and scientist, stands in their way. Seeing him as a person who has “nothing to live for but his memories” and “nothing to live with but his gadgets,” *The Family* seeks to end Neville’s life as a means of safeguarding their own society, often by using torches and catapults to assault Neville’s rather decadently luxurious compound. Neville, on the other hand, sees them as “poor miserable bastards” and likens them to vermin that need to be eradicated.

The ending of Sagal’s film is drastically different from Matheson’s novel. As *The Family* burn down Neville’s home and equipment, Neville breaks free and attempts to escape with Lisa, another human survivor among a handful that had retreated to the wilderness. Stopping at a fountain, Neville attempts to shoot the cult leader, Matthias. However, his gun jams, giving Matthias enough time to throw a spear which hits Neville square in the chest. As the fountain fills with blood, Neville props himself up while Lisa tells him that she cannot betray her Family. When daylight comes, a group of survivors, led by Dutch, discover Neville clinging to life in the fountain. Neville’s final act is to hand Dutch a flask of the blood serum that will restore humanity. Just before slumping over in the fountain and dying from blood loss, Neville sends the survivors to Lisa nearby

in an attempt to save her. The film ends with the camera pulling away from Neville in the bloody fountain with his arms splayed out in a manner reminiscent of Christ on the crucifix.

Sagal's film ignores much of what Matheson addresses in his novel. Neville does not realize the crimes he has committed against The Family and dies as a martyr, a testament to the last remaining humans and their resilience to survive. Regarding the ending of the adaptation, Hantke argues:

The Omega Man rewrites the theme of evolutionary and cultural progress in Matheson's novel in the register of generational change. Neville belongs to neither of the two groups of survivors who are fighting for control of the postapocalyptic future: the neo-medieval Luddites...and racially diverse patchwork family heading out to the countryside to start civilization afresh. (178)

Hantke suggests that, given the era when it was produced, Sagal's adaptation cannot be faithful to its source text because it speaks to a different generation. While both Nevilles are relics of the past, unable to fit into the new infected society ushered forth by the virus, Sagal's colonel cannot be part of the other society of humans either.

So what audience is Sagal then appealing to? In examining the context in which *The Omega Man* was produced, shot, and released, Sisco King contends that Sagal's film is a covert critique of the Vietnam War: "The opening shots of the film depict Neville driving his sports car around the streets of Los Angeles, wearing safari gear with his gun in tow. Like the heroes of the Vietnam War films that would follow in the coming decades, he patrols and searches" (48). From this, she goes on to suggest that The Family, who are cloaked in dark robes and hide amongst debris and corpses "resemble what

would become canonical representations of the enemy in Vietnam as ‘elusive, invisible, disguised’” (34). Certainly at the time when *Omega Man* was released, 1971, the death toll of American soldiers serving in Vietnam had reached an all-time high, leaving President Richard Nixon to begin the withdrawal of troops two years later.

In examining the connection between *Omega Man* and the Vietnam war, Sisco King argues that “*Omega Man* invites understanding of television as a technology with a destructive potential not unlike the actual weapons of warfare” (53). In one of the flashbacks showing various bodies, one shot depicts two corpses, eyes open and mouths ajar, in front of a television set, “killed while watching television” (53), with Sisco King suggesting that they died of shock from what they saw on television. She contends that, in disseminating knowledge of the outbreak, and being complicit in the deaths of these two victims, the television “bears particular historical significance given the public perception that much of the trauma of the Vietnam War owed to its mediation as the first ‘television war’” (53). She is also quick to point out that the phrase “living room war” was coined just two years before *The Omega Man*’s release, leading many to believe that Vietnam has been “cast as a war fought and lost in its mediated representations at home” (53). *Omega Man* is not directly about the Cold War, but about the Vietnam War, when the USA and the USSR aligned themselves with South Vietnam and North Vietnam, respectively, in a proxy war. With an American audience still deeply embroiled in Vietnam in 1971, it would make sense that Sagal had this context in mind as he shot the film. Instances of anti-war sentiment can be found in the film, particularly in the footage of the Woodstock festival.

Is Neville an anti-war advocate in the film? I would say no. While it would appear that the adaptation takes a stance against violence wrought by war, Sisco King argues that “with Neville also exalted in and by death...*Omega Man* does not entirely relinquish its investment in the violent logics of war and sacrifice. Dutch may lead a new generation of survivors but only *because* Neville was first willing to fall in the line of duty” (62). Sagal’s ending seems to promise that, through individual sacrifice, hope will be delivered to us. For Sagal, there is no middle ground or third faction to abate Dr. Neville’s bloodlust. Any sort of negotiation with The Family proves to be fruitless as shown when Lisa’s younger brother, Richie, attempts to convince them of the success of Neville’s curative serum. The film very much retains an adversary mentality and Sagal’s Neville is not only correct to kill, but is also absolved for those killings he performed as he strives to find a cure. His absolution, in the form of the blood serum he develops, allows for the continuance of the human race. In this film, we see his adversary stance as the correct one: Neville’s refusal to submit to The Family is the key to the salvation of the human race.

In looking back at Lawrence’s film, we can see why Lawrence adhered to and deviated from his source text, as well as why he included certain elements from the previous two adaptations. One of the more interesting aspects of Lawrence’s adaptation is the noticeable lack of romantic or sexual scenes between characters. There is a potential romance between Robert Morgan and Ruth in *The Last Man on Earth*; and a definite romance between Dr. Robert Neville and Lisa in *The Omega Man*. But Lawrence’s *I Am Legend* utterly abstains from any romance of any kind. The only other human characters that Dr. Neville meets in the film are Anna and her son Ethan. While we might view

Anna as a potential love interest for Neville, there are absolutely no intimate sexual or romantic moments shared by the two. Rather, both Anna and Ethan become for Neville a replacement family for the one he lost during the epidemic. Much like we saw in *War of the Worlds*, in *I Am Legend* there is no room for romance but plenty for family values. It would appear that in a post-9/11 context, something as grave as destruction on a massive scale necessitates that self-preservation and familial preservation become priorities while romance is a distraction. As Ray Ferrier steps up to become a true father to his two children, so must Dr. Neville become a paternal figure for Ethan. It would certainly seem that, in the immediate post-9/11 landscape, sexuality between characters is strictly off-limits. Lawrence's film, however, still performs its job in showing Neville as a person who has become emotionally unstable since inheriting Manhattan. Rather than lusting after women, he lusts for conversation. Instead of sexual gratification, he desires familial gratification. As he converses with mannequins and repeats movie lines verbatim, particularly a dialog in the movie *Shrek* (2001) regarding friendship, Dr. Neville shows us that he is an emotionally incomplete person without some level of human interaction. It is only when he becomes a father figure that we begin to like him and understand the choice he makes at the end of the film.

One of the key differences from the source text and, arguably, the most important, is Lawrence's decision to change the ending. The leader of the Dark Seekers repeatedly smashes his own body against the glass pane in attempt to reach Neville on the other side. However, one impact makes no noise. The camera pulls back to reveal that the cracks in the glass take the form of a butterfly. Neville, realizing this, pauses and remembers his daughter's words about a butterfly. He looks back at Anna, who is revealed to have a

small butterfly tattoo on her neck. The belated sound of the leader crashing into the glass then snaps Neville back into reality and he grabs a syringe to draw blood from the test patient who survived his clinical trials. He gives the vial of blood to a protected Anna, realizing that the Dark Seekers will not stop until he is dead. Grabbing a grenade from a drawer, Neville sacrifices himself to kill the Dark Seekers in the lab.

The next scene has Anna and Ethan finding the rumored survivors' colony as Anna's voiceover tells us that Neville gave his life to find and defend a cure. The film's final line is "We are his legacy. This is his legend. Light up the darkness." Once again, we see that Neville does not appear to realize the crimes he has committed. Hantke points out that "Neville will be remembered not as the monster, the other, the nightmare creature used to frighten children, but as the savior of humanity – and not the hybrid kind either, but a humanity untouched and unaffected by the Krippin Virus" (179). In this ending, we can see echoes of Sagal and Ragona. Neither they nor Lawrence's Neville realize fully the implications of their actions in killing their respective enemies. As a result, they die denouncing the very creatures Matheson would have them at least nominally identify with. None of these Nevilles learns the lesson presented to us in Matheson's novel. None of them actually realizes that he has become a legendary monster to the creatures he is trying to kill and that monstrosity is a relative, not an absolute, state.

There is also an alternate ending to Lawrence's film, which I will call Ending B, released onto the DVD as a special feature and regarded as the original ending to the film. It begins when the Dark Seekers storm Neville's lab. The leader confronts Neville, who is behind plate glass. Rather than smashing his body against the pane repeatedly, the creature then begins to draw something on the glass that resembles a butterfly, triggering

Neville's memory of his own daughter. Lifting his test subject's arm to reveal a butterfly tattoo, Neville realizes why the Dark Seekers attacked his home: to retrieve one of their own. Putting his gun down, Neville removes the intravenous hookup from the test subject on a gurney as the leader looks on. The leader calls off the other Dark Seekers from attacking Neville as he slowly rolls out the female test subject into the room with the leader. The leader stops attacking Neville, who gets back to work to restore the infection to the test subject. The leader looks lovingly at the woman and takes her off the gurney. Neville, in an act of genuine sincerity, exclaims that he is sorry. The leader and the Dark Seekers leave the lab, leaving Neville alive. The scene ends with the image of the wall of photographs of dead Dark Seekers from earlier testing trials splayed out and presumably dead from Neville's experimentation. Neville, Anna, and Ethan leave New York to look for other survivors in Vermont while a recording of Anna on the radio says, "Keep your radio on. Listen for our broadcasts. You are not alone. There is hope. Keep listening. You are not alone" before the credits begin to appear.

Depending on which ending is viewed, impressions of the film may vary wildly. Slavoj Žižek in his book, *Living in the End Times* (2010), comments on the theatrical ending of the film, Ending A, arguing that the film "openly [opts] for religious fundamentalism" (64). He continues:

In the film's final moments, just before his death, Neville changes sides and adopts [Anna's] fundamentalist perspective by assuming a Christological identification: Anna was brought to him so that he could give her the serum that she will take to Vermont. His sinful doubts are thus redeemed and we are at the exact opposite of the original book's premise: Neville is again a legend, but a

legend for the new humanity whose rebirth was made possible by his invention and sacrifice. (64)

What Žižek points out is that the theatrical ending, in attempting to placate audiences, directly inverts the intended meaning of the novel. Lawrence's Neville is a legend, but not in the sense that was originally intended by Matheson. The idea that Neville in Ending A is a Christ-like figure is not limited to Žižek alone, either. Hantke is quick to point out that both *The Last Man on Earth* and *The Omega Man* cast Neville "explicitly as a Christ figure: Vincent Price dies, literally, on the altar of a church, while the last shot of Charlton Heston shows him in a pose of crucifixion in a water fountain overflowing with his own blood" (178). In Ending A, Dr. Neville follows the tradition set by his predecessors and almost certainly saves humanity through his sacrifice. Neville cements his heroism through self-sacrifice, not unlike the firefighters and medics who risked and sacrificed their lives to help those on 9/11. In Ending A, Neville becomes that firefighter at Ground Zero. This ending, however, is at odds with Matheson's ending.

Indeed, the different endings of Lawrence's film entirely change how the film is received. Regarding Ending B, Janek Sirrs, visual effects supervisor for the film, explains that "Neville's – and the audience's – assumptions about the nature of these creatures are shown to be incorrect. We see that they have actually retained some of their humanity" (Taraldsvik 115). Ending B proved not to resonate well with audiences and so the director shot the second, or theatrical ending ("FAQ for *I Am Legend*"). When Neville looks back at the photographs of Dark Seekers he experimented on, he comes to realize the atrocities he has committed against the new race. He becomes the monster of their legends, much like Matheson's Neville. Even though he is allowed to live, Neville is

plagued with guilt for the atrocities he committed against this sentient race. This ending is closer to Matheson's because Neville becomes somewhat aware of his own monstrosity but is then spared by those who hunted him, indicating to us that Neville he has learned a lesson.

Depending on the ending, the Dark Seekers are sentient beings capable of feeling love and compassion (B), or they are monsters to the bitter end (A). There are a couple instances of the cleverness of the Dark Seekers in the body of the film, which proves to be much more subtle than first perceived by the viewer, suggesting they are more sentient than Neville initially asserts. In one scene, the Dark Seekers manage to trap Neville by placing a mannequin, one formerly seen at the abandoned video store, in front of Grand Central Station. A delusional Dr. Neville, unsure of how the mannequin got there, fires wildly into the surrounding buildings. However, in his rampage, he fails to see a snare set for him by the infected humans. He is caught in the trap, knocked out, and almost caught by the infected. They are also shown to have higher brain functions when they manage to find Neville's home and coordinate an attack against him. Sisco King comments that the Dark Seekers "take shelter in the darkness of abandoned buildings, closely recalling former president George W. Bush's repeated figurations of terrorists as 'shadowy' and hiding in 'caves and shadows'" (153). The Dark Seekers very much become then the monsters responsible for humanity's downfall, those who, as Neville comments, "changed everything."

Neville, throughout the majority of the movie, maintains the attitude that the Dark Seekers are inherently feral and incapable of any higher brain functions than basic survival. Upon noticing a Dark Seeker willingly subject itself to sunlight and glare at

him, he hypothesizes that “decreased brain function, growing scarcity of food is causing them to ignore their basic survival instincts” and that “typical human behavior is now entirely absent.” Neville repeatedly assures himself that the Dark Seekers are unintelligent, despite increasing evidence to the contrary, such as when they design a trap for him using his own materials. He even goes so far as to state that they are incapable of love or hate and only exist to feed on any remaining survivors. For Dr. Neville, one of the emotional anchors he clings to is to disallow any notion that the Dark Seekers, despite evolving from humans, have any remnant of humanity left. This may be why he hunts them so mercilessly in the film. Sisco King notes that in infiltrating the Dark Seekers’ hives, Neville “affirms Bush’s repeated insistence that we ‘go after’ our enemies ‘where they live’ – a positioning mirrored by resemblances between the film’s construction of hidden, nocturnal Dark Seekers and Bush’s description of terrorists as guided by a ‘dark vision’ and as hiding in ‘shadowy networks’” (153).

In the film’s theatrical version (A), Dr. Neville’s assertions are indeed correct. The bloodthirsty Dark Seekers are out for Neville’s blood and nothing will stop them from getting it. Neville, realizing this, sacrifices himself to ensure that Anna and Ethan can escape unharmed with a cure. However, if one sees the film with the original ending (B), then the Dark Seekers prove Dr. Neville’s claims wrong and are in fact creatures capable of feeling emotion and love. After resisting the truth for most of the film, Neville is finally able to accept that he was wrong in his hypothesis and comes to the startling realization that he has committed mass murder in a vain effort to find a cure.

So why did test audiences reject the original ending? In the DVD extra entitled “The Story,” Will Smith said he became enamored with the idea of Lawrence’s *I Am*

Legend because it is a tale of the “possibility of life after loss” (“The Story”). In the DVD commentary, Lawrence and Goldsman comment that the endings “could not be more different...but they both work in their different ways and [they] think [they] found that the original ending...lands on much more of a philosophical idea whereas [the theatrical] ending lands much more on an emotional level” (“The Story”). For the theatrical ending, they comment that “there is a plan, there is a larger sense of connectedness” and that “his revelation is that maybe it’s not all just science: it’s actually science and some other force that’s out there” (“The Story”). It cannot really be argued simplistically that the focus group audiences opted for a happy ending, as both variants end happily for either Neville or humanity, unlike Matheson’s novel. No, there is something much more complicated going on with these endings than just having the hero sacrifice himself and the survivors live happily ever after or not sacrifice himself yet the survivors still live happily ever after.

Sisco King comments, “Refusing to bear witness to his own violence, [Neville] obliterates all traces of himself and the traumatic history he had helped to create. After Neville detonates the grenade, the screen fades to white, visually signaling the film’s attempts to clean up or whitewash an untidy past” (155-56). Seen in this light, Lawrence’s film reworks Sagal’s adaptation. Both Nevilles, upon discovering they are unable to dwell within the past as lost relics of humanity, and as well unable to dwell in the present by refusing to acknowledge their own monstrosity, instead sacrifice themselves to ensure a future for humanity. Unlike Ragona’s Neville, who sees no future, both the Sagal and Lawrence Nevilles strive towards an ending where humanity may be saved. Even as they die, both look onward to the potential of life after disaster, with

Sagal's Neville securing a serum for Dutch and Lawrence's Neville ensuring Anna's and Ethan's survival. Coincidentally, it is in their sacrifice that they secure themselves as heroes against the foreign menace that caused humanity's downfall. Therefore, the focus of both films' narratives shift away from dwelling on the notion of the relativity of perspective and more towards the idea of a promising future after tragedy.

Bob Mondello interprets the theatrical ending of the film as a response to 9/11: "Western medicine takes a virus (a bad thing) and manipulates it so that it can fight cancer (a worse thing). Sort of like Western military forces arming jihadists (which they regard as a bad thing) so that they'll fight communists (which they regard as a worse thing)" (Mondello). In a follow-up interview with Francis Lawrence and Akiva Goldsman, Neda Ulaby asks them how their film was influenced by 9/11, as Mondello had suggested in his radio program. Admitting that movies can express subconscious anxieties, Goldsman says they "never planted anything in the story to mirror 9/11 or terrorism in any way" (Ulaby). He even goes on to say that he purposely did not link the virus to bioterrorism because it was too topical, "but that doesn't mean that somehow the creation of the story...[doesn't] reflect some sort of subconscious idea of ours." Lawrence continues:

There is no question that 9/11 is now part of our imagination....everybody has turned it over in their head so many times, it turned out to be impossible to tell a story about the end of the world without this recent catastrophic event that sort have seemed to promise in our imaginations for a second the end of the world. It's impossible to not have the two collide. (Ulaby)

Despite not directly identifying *I Am Legend* as a post-9/11 film, Lawrence understands that in creating an apocalyptic film in the post-9/11 era, one cannot escape the association. Considering how much in it is different from the source text and the previous adaptations, *I Am Legend* has obviously been updated to appeal to its current audience, a post-9/11 audience. While Lawrence may not have consciously thought he was making a post-9/11 film, it would appear that 9/11 is something his audience wanted to see treated on screen. Via its images of panicked crowds and empty streets, its allusions to salvation in the ending, coupled with the profit the film made and focus group reaction, *I Am Legend* helped its audience to negotiate the trauma of 9/11 by allowing them to look forward to a future of peace. Neville's valiant sacrifice to ensure Anna and Ethan's survival and safe passage to the survivors' colony promises that humanity will continue to remain and thrive. Rather than dwelling on the tragedy itself, the film promises that American society would be able to move on.

Chapter 3: “Fear Changes Everything”: Despair and Punishment in Frank Darabont’s *The Mist* (2007)

The subject of this final chapter is Frank Darabont’s *The Mist*, the first and so far only adaptation of Stephen King’s novella, “The Mist” (1980). Described as “America’s definitive post-9/11 movie” by film critic John Patterson of *The Guardian*, Darabont’s 2007 film presents a seemingly nihilistic apocalyptic landscape offering little hope of redemption. Darabont himself even points out that his movie has “been on the back burner for a long time and the past seven years in this country made me take this story and make it a wounded, angry cry” (qtd. in Patterson). Stephen King speaks fondly of this adaptation and comments that it “has echoes of political and religious situations that we find ourselves in now” and “raises a lot of interesting topics that have been debated...over the last couple of years” (“When Darkness Came”). With a modest budget of \$13,000,000, the film performed fairly well in theatres, grossing \$25,593,755 domestically and \$29,777,490 internationally (*The Numbers*). Its commercial success is therefore comparable to, if not better than, its fellow contemporary adaptations with larger budgets, as *The Mist* made over four times its budget in profit, whereas *War of the Worlds* made just under 4.5 times its budget in profit and *I Am Legend* made 3.9 times its budget.

The Mist differs from the other two films analyzed here in that there is no imagery that is obviously and immediately evocative of 9/11. Unlike *War of the Worlds* and *I Am Legend*, the film does not contain grandiose shots of toppling buildings or abandoned city streets. It is not set in New York or a neighboring city, but rather a small town. The setting is restricted to a supermarket, with the blanketing mist that obscures almost

everything outside. However, the film evokes the memory of 9/11 indirectly through its characters and their reactions to the horrific events that surround them. They witness horror the same way we witnessed it on our televisions on September 11. Their reactions, however exaggerated, are not unlike ones we experienced when attempting to cope with the horror shown on our screens. In doing this, *The Mist* raises thematic issues of how we interpret and respond to disaster and external unknowable threats. In addition, Darabont's film explores a very different angle of mediating 9/11 from Spielberg and Lawrence. Spielberg's film and Lawrence's edited ending suggest to the viewer that humanity will carry on, and, in this sense, Darabont's film is similar. However, whereas the former two films are much more hopeful in tone, Darabont's film suggests that death is indiscriminate and inescapable, and *The Mist* ends significantly more unhappily. Rather than promising hope, Darabont's film admonishes its protagonist for falling into despair. If this happens, it suggests, then no ending, no matter how positive, will remedy the trauma experienced.

David Drayton (Thomas Jane) takes his eight-year-old son Billy (Nathan Gamble) and their neighbor to the local grocery store at Bridgton, Maine, to purchase supplies after a violent thunderstorm severely damages nearby properties. However, soon after they arrive at the store, a thick mist begins to envelop the surrounding area. In it are a host of otherworldly monsters that kill whoever is unfortunate enough to be caught outside. The customers lock themselves in the grocery store in an effort to protect themselves from the monsters, but, despite their best efforts at self-preservation, more deaths occur and soon the situation inside becomes as dire as outside. Like *War of the Worlds*, Darabont's film concerns itself with an invasion as it happens, albeit one on a

much smaller scale. Yet, unlike Spielberg's film, *The Mist* is far from life-affirming and, while the importance of family is still a cornerstone of the characters' motivations, family solidarity will not remedy adversity. In addition, like Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, the downfall of humanity in *The Mist* derives from hubristic human activity, but this film does not promise redemption and salvation through self-sacrifice.

The 9/11 imagery in *The Mist* is much more subtle and implied than in the two adaptations discussed earlier. No aircraft fall from the sky, nor do we see establishing shots of missing persons placards or television screens or camera LCD monitors framing events, traumatic or otherwise. Panic in the film occurs on a small scale, with no more than three dozen people at any one time, all of whom are confined to a single building in a small town. Rather than showing us catastrophic imagery reminiscent of 9/11 and the days following, *The Mist* presents us with images reminiscent of ourselves, the viewers in front of our television screens, as we watched in horror what unfolded in front of us.

Multiple deaths are shown on camera: a bag-boy partially eaten and then dragged into the mist; a cashier fatally stung by a monstrous insect; a biker bisected as he tries to retrieve a shotgun; a Military Police officer who is attacked by spider-like creatures, and so on. Since the grocery store is so small, deaths are ill-kept secrets, especially when someone reacts to discovering a body. However, it is not through the gore that *The Mist* evokes the memory of 9/11, as many of these deaths are unlikely to occur in real life. Rather, the film invokes the trauma of 9/11 through reaction shots of people's faces watching the horror. Hattie (Susan Malerstein), unable to cope with her situation, commits suicide via a prescription pill overdose. Amanda Dumfries (Laurie Holden) confesses to Drayton that she keeps thinking she'll "wake up in a rubber room." Drayton

attempts to remain stoic to keep order in the group despite witnessing nearly every death that occurs in the grocery store. Out-of-towner Brent Norton (Andre Braugher) flatly denies clear evidence of the mist's dangers, even going so far as to suggest that the townsfolk are playing a trick on him using cow's blood. Jim Grondin (William Sadler) becomes so traumatized by what he has seen that he becomes another mindless follower of Mrs. Carmody (Marcia Gay Harden) and participates in the ritual murder of Private Jessup (Sam Witwer) in an attempt to demand "expiation" for whatever sins have brought down the mist. Hattie completely loses hope and in her desperation, kills herself. For Dumfries, the situation seems to be so unreal that she begins to wonder if she has become insane. Norton cannot accept what is happening and, as a result, denies the obvious dangers of the mist. Grondin looks to a leader who will help him understand the trauma he has experienced and blindly follows Mrs. Carmody. She rallies people behind her own crazed agenda by exploiting their fear.

No individual is immune to irrational reactions. Even Mrs. Carmody, who remains resolute in the belief that she is the "vessel of God," panics at the sight of Private Jessup getting stabbed by the store butcher (Ron Clinton Smith). She quickly regains composure, driving her followers into a frenzy in an attempt to control her own fear. This spectrum of reactions is reminiscent of how people responded to September 11, 2001. Some could only cry as they witnessed death. Some tried to remain stoic for the sake of the group. Some felt it was "like a movie" or "didn't seem real" because they were unable to cope with the experience (Frost 15). Others went into denial, like Norton, or looked to any leader who could provide an explanation, no matter how irrational, for what had happened, like Jim Grondin.

Some of the most prominent examples of reaction imagery in the film are seen when people turn to face the mist. For example, when the headstrong bag-boy Norm (Chris Owen) volunteers to unplug a vent that prevents a generator from working properly, he is quickly and painfully snatched by a monster, our first hint of what lies in wait in the mist. Just before Norm is attacked, the group at the loading dock crouches down and stares as the door slowly lifts up to reveal the mist on the other side. Since the store is without power, the loading dock is dark, and the door, opened manually, allows misty daylight into the room. There is a shot of the door going up and the mist gently pouring into the room, and then reaction shots of each of the group's faces as they are illuminated by the light. In other instances, the mist actually becomes the brightest object on camera, so that people facing towards it shield their eyes from its intensity. As Wetmore points out, "As on 9/11, those in the supermarket wait and watch and guess at what is happening" (121).

Here is an example of the "horror of togetherness," a collectively experienced phenomena, as everyone in the store participates in watching the destruction wrought by the mist. Faces illuminated by something they cannot understand, the survivors in the grocery store collectively watch and wait and debate what their next action should be because none of them has experienced what is currently happening to them. Some gather behind Norton, who leads an expedition outside and fails to return, disappearing into the mist without providing any insight into what is occurring. Others support Mrs. Carmody and her fundamentalist approach to the phenomenon, believing the mist to come straight from the Book of Revelations. As Aviva Briefel points out:

Any attempt to form a close-knit consumer community fails. The only type of community that does succeed is the divisive – and ultimately destructive – religious contingent led by the delusional Mrs. Carmody. With its poisonous suspicion and persecution of anyone who does not mirror its ideals, this community reproduces post- 9/11 right-wing fanaticisms. (157)

The banding behind Mrs. Carmody and her abuse of power to demand sacrifices both conjure up memories of the events immediately following 9/11, when President George W. Bush, whose presidential approval ratings soared as high as 90% (“Presidential Approval Ratings – George W. Bush”), led the United States into an invasion of Afghanistan and led a “coalition of the willing” into Iraq in 2003. In the days and months following the terrorist attacks, Muslims, Southeast Asians, and Sikhs were reported as being victims of hate crimes (“Hate Crime Reports Up in Wake of Terrorist Attacks”).

It is in the mist itself that I would argue that 9/11 imagery is most prevalent. One could compare it to the plumes of ash and dust that fell from the Manhattan sky that day. While the film does not depict planes falling from the sky or the toppling of skyscrapers, the mist serves a similar function to the broadcast images from the Twin Towers to millions of American homes. The people in the ordinary grocery store peer out, faces illuminated, and see death all around them. Should they venture forth into the mist, they are very likely to witness horrific death first-hand or die themselves. Yet, the only choices they have are either to brave the mist or attempt to wait it out. No survivor can escape the mist without negative consequences. Any attempt to deny its reality further exacerbates the problem of comprehension for others. Furthermore, the mist traps and contains the survivors, bringing them together, even if against their will. Like it or not,

they are stuck and must strive to understand and accept what is happening if they are not to be lost.

It is significant that the survivors are confined to a grocery store. A grocery store is a place where everyone in a small community is likely to visit, so it contains a cross-section of the community. It offers a surplus of food and therefore is a rational location to seek shelter, but also is figuratively the epicenter and heart of a small town. It is at first glance a fortunate place to be trapped in, combining essential resources for people communally seeking shelter from catastrophe. Unlike a church, it provides what Aviva Briefel calls “a site of refuge, gossip, and sustenance” and a “‘town square’ ideal” (156). Yet this one quickly degenerates into its antithesis: a prison filled with potentially violent people.

Through these implications and allusions, Darabont is able to evoke the memory of 9/11 in his audience’s minds. However, unlike *War of the Worlds* and *I Am Legend*, Darabont’s *The Mist* has no prior cinematic adaptations with which to compare it. We can only look at its source text, Stephen King’s novella and apply what we have learned from the previous two adaptive relationships to understand how Darabont’s adaptation helps his audience to mediate the trauma and horror associated with 9/11.

King’s novella was first published in 1980 in the anthology *Dark Forces* and later republished in his second short fiction collection, *Skeleton Crew* (1985). The 134-page narrative was republished again as a stand-alone paperback in 2007 to coincide with the theatrical release. Broken into ten separately titled chapters, the novella centers on the visual artist David Drayton as he and others are forced into hiding in a small-town supermarket as the town is overrun by predatory, transdimensional creatures that were

apparently brought into existence inadvertently by a secret military project. The religious fanaticism of one of the survivors, Mrs. Carmody, causes Drayton to realize that the dangers within the grocery store are comparable to the dangers outside, as people begin to violently turn on each other in the search for a scapegoat.

The trapped people begin to divide into two groups. The first, the Flat-Earth Society, as Drayton calls them, is headed by Brent Norton, Drayton's neighbor. Norton, who Drayton, Ollie, Jim, and Myron approach after the bag-boy is killed by a tentacled monster, refuses to believe in Drayton's story, saying "No, no, no. Forgive me, gentlemen, but it's completely ridiculous. Either you're having me on...or you're suffering from some form of group hypnosis" (81). Believing that the locals have a distrust for out-of-towners such as he, he claims that they are playing a joke on him, a "banana skin and [he is] the guy that's supposed to slip on it" (82). Drayton is convinced Norton's sanity depends upon his ability to deny the reality of the situation. Norton forms a coalition with like-minded deniers, then he announces that the group is going to leave the store. He remains resolute in his decision, claiming that the people who follow him are "his people" as if they were his to command (98). When Norton and the other Flat-Earth Society members leave the store, they are never seen again.

The other group is comprised of the followers of Mrs. Carmody. She gradually convinces people that entering the mist will mean certain death, about which she is mostly correct. As her 'predictions' that people will die are mostly fulfilled, she soon gathers a flock of people who view her as a prophet. Near the end of the novella, shortly before he and some other survivors attempt to escape the store, Drayton realizes the power that Carmody commands: "it was the mist that had given her that power – the

power to cloud men's minds" (141). The eccentric old woman Mrs. Carmody, formerly disregarded, is now able to command people to do her bidding through their fear of the mist. Believing herself to be an agent of God, Carmody leads anyone who will listen on a witch-hunt to punish those she believes to be sinners and disbelievers. When people become more frightened, she demands a "blood sacrifice" to appease God, a motivation that Drayton feels runs "deeper and darker than Puritanism" (90), and evokes the memory of the Salem Witch Trials of the late 1600s in Massachusetts. She delivers hours-long sermons that evoke to Drayton the images of the painter/theologian Hieronymus Bosch and engraver Gustave Doré as well as the American evangelist preacher Jonathan Edwards (139-40) as a means of whipping her followers into a frenzy so that they carry out her demand for "expiation" (143).

Soon, other people come to understand the threat Mrs. Carmody poses to the group's survival. Herald and survivor of the mist, Dan Miller exclaims to Drayton that if the pterosaur-monsters come back again like they did the previous night, Carmody will have a congregation by the next day and they'll be wanting human sacrifices (124). Just before Drayton and other survivors leave the store, Carmody realizes their plan and attempts to thwart them by calling on the mob to sacrifice Drayton's son and Amanda Dumfries, the latter of whom she brands as a whore because of her affair with Drayton.

The leaders of both of these groups, the Flat-Earth Society and Carmody's cult, prey upon the fear of other survivors in order to establish control over the situation. For Norton, as long as he can convince himself that nothing exists in the mist, he can convince others that he is correct and subsequently leads a small band presumably to their deaths. Carmody, on the other hand, approaches the situation quite differently. She

understands that the people in the store cannot deny the deaths they have seen so far, and instead convinces many of them that the mist is punishment from an angry God for humankind's sins. Ultimately Carmody is shot by Ollie Weekes. Drayton and some other survivors, including his son, Amanda, and Mrs. Reppler, realizing that staying put is just as dangerous as going outside, flee the store. Choosing to follow either Norton or Carmody, it would seem, ends in disaster, as Norton's followers disappear and Carmody's are sheep without a shepherd when she is killed.

In examining both groups, David A. Oakes, in *Science and Destabilization in the Modern American Gothic* (2000), comments that "Individuals must be willing to abandon their old concepts and be adaptable. If people cling to a vanished world, it may end in disaster" (96). Both camps find themselves unable to cope alone with what is happening around them and, as a result, flock to whomever seems to provide them with an answer. Oakes further contends, "People cannot hide from the truth, and they need to accept a new vision of consensus reality and face the changes with courage" (97). By observing how people in the grocery store react to the mist, Oakes posits that the only people who potentially will survive the mist are those who "accept the mist's existence and all it implies about the changed nature of the world" (97). In understanding and accepting that their world has indeed changed since the coming of the mist, characters show adaptability and have a better chance at survival. Drayton, in Oakes' eyes, then becomes the model example of this psychological adjustment, and survives at the end of the novella. He accepts the dangers that lie in the mist, but also understands that Mrs. Carmody poses as much, if not more, of a threat to human life.

The only likely explanation for the descent of the mist lies in the Arrowhead Project located in Shaymore, a nearby government site (King 41). Before the arrival of the mist, rumors spread amongst the townspeople about government-funded activities at the site. They include experiments that shoot “atoms into the air” (41), agricultural experiments with genetically modified food (41-42), and a geological survey dealing with shale oil (42). Later, Drayton and Ollie discover the corpses of military officers who committed suicide in the store. This leads Ollie to suggest that whatever happened at Arrowhead may have been an accident: “They could have been fooling around with anything....suppose they ripped a hole straight through into another dimension” (117). As they hide the bodies under some bags of dog food, Drayton notes, “It’s like the Nazi war criminals killing themselves in their cells after the war is lost” (118).

While we are never given confirmation about the nature of the Arrowhead Project, we can assume that those involved in it are likely somehow responsible for bringing about the mist. King scholar Gary Hoppenstand points out that in the “The Mist,” “King dramatizes overt and easily recognized technological damage brought about by the systems themselves and the people who operate them” (206). His trope of technological hubris is very similar to what brought about the vampire plague in Matheson’s novel *I Am Legend*. The disaster that brings about the downfall of humanity is self-generated, coming from within rather than inflicted from without.

The novella ends ambiguously, as David and a handful of survivors escape the store and drive off into the mist in hope of rescue. Drayton leaves their story in a manuscript on the counter of a Howard Johnson’s restaurant, a temporary refuge. Attempting to find a working radio station, he believes he hears the word “Hartford” and

comes to the conclusion that there may be safety there (153-54). This bloodless end is in contrast to the many violent deaths brought about by the mist, and yet its vagueness does not instill much hope in the reader, as the possibility of Drayton finding help seems remote. We never find out what will happen to Drayton's group of survivors, whether they will die in the mist or find a way to survive.

There are two key ideas that we come to understand from King's novella: the need for individuals to adapt to post-catastrophic surroundings by accepting the situation that they are in; and the knowledge that technological hubris may lead to the downfall of humanity. It is clear that King's novella expresses anxiety about the potential evil in technology (Davis 168). So how does *The Mist* under Darabont's direction differ? There are some minor changes to the story, mainly cosmetic: Hilda Reppler is renamed Irene Reppler, Mrs. Carmody's apparent age is readjusted, and certain conflicts are recast. For example, Amanda Dumfries and Irene Reppler strike Carmody, as opposed to unnamed characters. But in general Darabont stays close to King's novella. Major dialogue scenes are used verbatim and the supermarket setting is pictured as described.

In remediating the narrative to film, Darabont does make a few changes to further support certain ideas King touches upon. For example, he includes Private Jessup, a new character who is stationed at the Arrowhead Project, as a scapegoat for Carmody's cult to sacrifice. Jessup is cited as personally responsible for the unleashing of the mist through the Arrowhead Project (a badge of which can be seen on Jessup's left shoulder). In this instance, what has been left vague in the novella by King is more clearly explained in the film. When Drayton leads survivors to the pharmacy for a supply run, he comes across a nearly dead MP officer seen earlier in the film before the mist appears. The MP exclaims

to Drayton that “it’s all our fault” before he dies from his wounds. When he is interrogated by the mob, Private Jessup confesses, “I heard stuff...how they thought there were other dimensions, other worlds all around us and how they wanted to try to make a window so they could look through and see what’s on the other side.” While Mrs. Carmody blames Jessup for personally bringing the mist, Jessup places responsibility on the scientists stationed at the base for opening a dimensional portal and allowing the mist to spill into our world. Clearly, the mist in the film is the result of scientific experimentation by the military.

In contrast, Darabont omits Drayton’s prophetic dream sequences and Drayton’s adulterous tryst with Amanda Dumfries. Near the start of the novella, Drayton mentions that he had a dream of “God walking across...the far side of the lake, a God so gigantic that above the waist He was lost in a clear blue sky” (King 30). With the arrival of this God, the cottages and houses burst into flame that produce a smoke that engulfs the area, much like a mist would (30). Later in the novella, Drayton and the survivors in the vehicle find themselves under the legs of a monster so large that the rest of it is obscured by the mist (151). In another dream, Drayton is separated from his family and is unable to get to them. He watches in horror as one of the pterosaur monsters eats his family and then he hears a voice whispering the words “the Arrowhead Project” repeatedly (111). This dream precipitates Ollie and Drayton’s discussion about the Arrowhead Project being responsible for unleashing the mist. Darabont’s decision to omit these scenes may seem odd, as they foreshadow the later events in the narrative. Mark Browning, in *Stephen King on the Small Screen* (2011), is quick to point out, however, that “Darabont

felt viewers would find hard to accept [these scenes] without giving his protagonist some kind of psychic powers and explanation for such capability” (93).

The second omission, however, is much more significant, especially when the genre of the film and its historical moment are considered: Drayton’s affair with Amanda Dumfrey (changed from Dumfries). Unlike in the novella, Amanda and Drayton do not spend a night together locked in one of the offices in the store. Rather, Darabont’s Amanda is completely devoted to Drayton’s son, Billy, and tends to him whenever he is upset. Written into the screenplay as a teacher for special needs students, Amanda becomes a surrogate mother figure for Billy, calming him when he is agitated. Moreover, as Wetmore points out, “David in the film is a good family man whose first stop upon leaving the store is his own home, in order to rescue his wife” (126) while King’s Drayton admits to cheating on his wife (King 119) and does not return home.

The reason why the omission of adultery is important is because, as we saw in the previous adaptations, sexual relationships, illicit or otherwise, seem to have no place in post-9/11 disaster films. However, Darabont’s Mrs. Carmody does refer to Amanda as a ‘whore’ to convince the mob to sacrifice her. In the novella, this slur, however harsh it may be, would seem to ring more true than in the film. Wetmore feels, however, that an actual affair is not needed because Carmody does not need a real reason to turn on Drayton and Amanda. That Drayton and his companions do not follow Mrs. Carmody provides her with enough of a reason why they should be sacrificed (128).

The greatest change of all that Darabont made, however, was to the ending. In a conversation with Darabont, Stephen King asked the director about how he came to end the film. Darabont admits that it was certainly a balancing act between the budget allotted

to him and maintaining the end, with a lower budget ensuring a greater chance of retaining his bleak ending (“A Conversation”). Since the film’s ending was considerably bleaker than King’s ending, Darabont compromised with the film studio, and was allowed to keep the ending to his script without any revisions, meaning that his film avoided a Hollywood-esque happy ending and a life-affirming theme.

Unlike King’s novella, which ends on an ambiguously hopeful note, Darabont’s ending to *The Mist* is far more punishing and brutal, at least for Drayton. He, Amanda, Billy, Irene, and Dan all manage to escape in Drayton’s Land Cruiser. They head south to try to outrun the mist, but eventually run out of fuel and are left stranded. Drayton, with a handgun and only four bullets, realizes that he can mercy-kill the others, but not himself. He decides that he will “figure something out” in order to spare the others a horrific death at the monsters’ hands. After expending the four rounds shooting his son and his companions, Drayton frantically attempts to turn the gun on himself, knowing full well that there are no more bullets in the chamber with which to end his life. He steps out of the vehicle to wait for his demise. A low booming sound can be heard off in the distance, which we can assume is the colossal monster they had driven beneath moments before. However, instead Drayton is greeted by a tank and a host of soldiers clearing a path with flamethrowers. Behind them are open-bed trucks transporting people, including a woman who was formerly at the grocery store, reunited with her two children. Having realized he has murdered his son just before they were about to be rescued, Drayton collapses to his knees and screams while the military convoy passes him.

Interestingly, Stephen King, upon viewing Darabont’s ending, expressed his approval for it, saying that he preferred it over his own (Browning 89). In his interview

with Darabont, King even admits to wishing that he could have came up with such an ending for his novella (“A Conversation”). Wetmore points out, “The shot of the surviving family confirms the randomness of death in the mist as well” (122). What’s even bleaker to consider, however, is the direction in which Drayton’s vehicle is pointed in regards to the direction the military convoy is travelling. Drayton and his companions have been driving in front of the convoy for some time. What we are left with in this ending, which demonstrates “that sometimes death is not the worst thing that can happen” (Wetmore 117) in an “apparently godless universe which allows such things to take place” (Browning 101). Drayton’s killing his own son moments before they were rescued becomes far worse than death itself.

In examining the ending, Wetmore contends that Darabont’s narrative does not “allow for the purging of pity or fear, and instead we leave the cinema or turn off the DVD with no sense of relief....The evil is still present in one’s mind, undefeated and victorious” (135). The viewers are denied their catharsis, the emotional purgation found in the endings of *War of the Worlds*, when Ray Ferrier returns his children at last to their mother’s side, and in *I Am Legend*, where (depending on the versions) either Neville sacrifices himself for the betterment of humanity or leaves the city alive as a father to his new family. Yet, in one sense, *The Mist* would seem to have a happy ending, insofar as the human race will continue to exist, as the monsters are slowly purged from the mist. The bleakness of the film’s ending lies not so much as the possibility of humanity’s extinction, but rather in personal loss.

There is no ambiguity as to what message *The Mist* is sending, Wetmore argues, as the film “makes it clear in virtually every scene that heroics and bravado are useless

and get people killed” (129). While Wetmore is correct in his assertion that death in *The Mist* is arbitrary and unfair, his suggestion that “there is no God, there is no authority figure that can fix the situation, nothing saves us and everybody or almost everybody dies” (118) does seem somewhat inaccurate. Salvation is possible, but cannot be bought by death. In the ending set up for us by Darabont, Drayton and the others would have survived had they waited a little bit longer than immediately after running out of gas in the vehicle. Drayton’s seeming selflessness by sparing others a more horrific death is punished in the film and seen as an unnecessary sacrifice.

Additionally, I believe Wetmore misses the point of Darabont’s ending when the genre of the film is considered. Yes, the ending is unhappy and bleak, but looking at the genre of horror, there is much more at play. Rather, *The Mist*’s bleak ending appears to serve as a cautionary tale, taking lessons from King’s novella and updating them for a post-9/11 audience. As we saw in King, individuals must adapt to their surroundings, as opposed to denying their situations, in order to have a chance to survive. Wetmore points out that “While Norton and Carmody both believe they have the answers and are doing the right thing, both are clearly doing damage and bring death to themselves and others as a result” (124). Both Norton and Carmody cling to their old-world views and refuse to acknowledge the change the mist brings about. Norton denies any danger associated with the mist, despite seeing evidence to prove the contrary and Mrs. Carmody represents fundamentalist, fanatic views, seeing the mist as punishment from an angry God who demands sacrifice. Norton presumably dies and Carmody is killed not by the monsters, but by those who covertly understood her to be a threat to life, as she planned to sacrifice more people to the mist. Drayton will also ultimately fail to adapt to the mist as well.

Throughout the film, Drayton is a stoic figure and while his attempt to help the people trapped in the grocery store does not end as intended, he remains resolute in helping others and maintaining hope that they will be saved. However, running out of gasoline proves to be Drayton's undoing. No longer does he try to find a way to persevere. He simply gives up hope and assumes that the five of them will die in the mist. While Drayton may believe that his mercy killings are altruistic, he really takes their lives because he has lost all hope. Much like Norton and, to a greater extent, Carmody lost in their delusions, Drayton sees only one possible answer: he must kill the others in order to "spare" them from the horrors of the mist.

Drayton's subsequent punishment for his despair follows in the same vein as the message conveyed in both *War of the Worlds* and *I Am Legend*, albeit in a slightly different manner. Both *War of the Worlds* and the dual endings of *I Am Legend* place emphasis on the family unit, adopted or otherwise, and promise the audience that as long as the family unit is sustained, humans will endure. Ray returns his children to their mother just as the tripods start to fail and Neville either sacrifices himself to preserve his adopted family or travels with them as a surrogate paternal figure, both of which will lead to a hopeful ending. Both protagonists, despite how overwhelming the odds are against them, maintain hope for a better tomorrow and are rewarded for this hope.

The Mist, however, clearly does not provide a hopeful ending for its protagonist. Rather than return to life-affirming themes through a positive ending, Darabont shows us the danger facing someone who strays from that path. Drayton, who had otherwise been family-oriented for a majority of the film, loses his moral compass in a fit of despair as their vehicle runs out of gas. While he justifies to himself and the other survivors that

what he is doing is for the best, he is in fact betraying that family-oriented value by taking their lives. At the very last moment, just as his resolve is being tested, Drayton fails and succumbs to despair and commits an action that goes against what he ought to hold dear: the family. Since he took the lives of these people, Drayton cannot be rewarded with a quick death at the hands of the monsters. Rather, he must now live with the guilt that he took these people's lives unjustly and vainly. He is punished for having disavowed his faith in family.

Ultimately, Wetmore concludes his analysis by claiming that *The Mist* raises two large questions: "how we interpret disaster, and how we choose to respond to threats, especially when we do not fully understand them" (129). I agree with him. The reactions from people in both attempting to understand the mist as well as the various ways in which they attempt to cope are fundamental to Darabont's adaptation. In addition, the ending of Darabont's film suggests to the viewer that, in a post-9/11 context, death is indiscriminate and, given the catastrophic circumstances, is unavoidable. Yet also in this context, Drayton's decision to end others' lives so as to save them from suffering is not noble, but a sign of despair, which Wetmore does not touch upon. Despite the odds Drayton faces, he must rise above them in order to save his family. He fails to achieve this in the very last moments before they would be saved and is punished with a fate worse than death for this failure. What we come to understand about Darabont's *The Mist* is that, above all, it is important to retain hope.

Conclusion: Unfinished Business in the Wake of Invasion

In the study of cinematic adaptations, it is important to try to understand not only the context in which the source text was created, but also the context in which the film was produced. Adaptations that are aesthetically and commercially successful are sensitive to contemporary context. H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, reimagined and reinterpreted, has been successfully adapted to changing conditions through the one-hundred-plus years of its existence. While we are far from 1890s London, Wells's narrative about humanity's struggle to survive an alien invasion continues to appeal to readers. *The War of the Worlds* has generated dozens of adaptations in film, television, video games, comic books, and radio. Orson Welles' radio drama *The War of the Worlds* (1938) was a contemporary retelling of events in the novel, presented as news bulletins interrupting regular radio broadcasting, updated to the present and relocated to an American setting. While the panic it caused among its unwitting audience may indeed be exaggerated, it is remembered to this day. With the adaptation of literary classics, updating, indigenization, and remediation are necessary, especially with remakes. It is through such adaptations that old stories are given new life.

Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*, Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, and Darabont's *The Mist* are all examples of source texts from a pre-9/11 world adapted into a post-9/11 world for a post-9/11 audience. But why would a post-9/11 audience respond to an adaptation of a source from an earlier world? In each adaptation, the director relocated the setting and/or updated the time to reflect contemporary concerns. Since the movie-going audiences in the aftermath of 9/11 were still coming to terms with the event and its impact, each film attempts to remediate the trauma of 9/11 to its audience by adapting a

familiar narrative, representing invading terrorists as inhuman antagonists, and using imagery that subtly alludes to that seen on September 11, 2001.

All three films emphasize different meanings from their original source texts. The pre-9/11 adaptations did this too. Byron Haskin's *The War of the Worlds* suggested that Christian faith would overcome any adversity. Likewise, Boris Sagal's *Omega Man* offered a critique of the Vietnam War. But different themes came to the fore post-9/11, in particular, the importance of family, the uncertain impact of self-sacrifice, and the irrelevance of romance to the problems at hand. Ray Ferrier transforms from deadbeat father to responsible dad by ensuring his children's safe return to their mother. Dr. Neville either becomes a surrogate father figure for a newfound family or sacrifices his life to ensure the continued survival of his family and, to a greater extent, humanity. Conversely, David Drayton is punished for taking the lives of his surrogate family in an unjustified mercy killing. While both Ray and Neville are rewarded for their sacrifice, Drayton's fate is worse than his counterparts'. His sacrifice, while seemingly noble, is one made in despair, while Ray and Neville, who risk themselves for their loved ones, never lose hope.

An interesting trend in the post-9/11 disaster movie is the complete absence of any sort of sexual romance. Romantic, sexual, or lustful scenes depicted in the source texts were written entirely out of the three adaptations. No longer is *War of the World's* protagonist striving to reunite with his wife, nor does *I Am Legend's* Neville lust after the bodies of the vampiric women. *The Mist's* Drayton does not commit adultery with Amanda, and he remains faithful to his wife until the end of the film, even when he confirms that she is indeed dead. Instead of romance, the maintenance of the family unit,

even when the family is non-biological, is the priority. Ferrier learns to survive for the sake of his children, and never reunites with his ex-wife. Dr. Neville, after losing his family during the contagion outbreak, becomes lost and socially maladjusted until the appearance of Anna and her son Ethan. While we are unsure of the fate of Drayton's wife, Steff, and their son Billy until the end of the film, Drayton, who commits no sexual offence, abandons hope and is subsequently punished for committing such a deed. The replacement of romantic elements with the ones that emphasize the importance of family poses an interesting question to be further investigated, as the romantic and sexual sanitization of these three adaptations is very much deliberate and calculated.

There are other aspects of these films to be explored further. Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* presents Ray Ferrier, a blue-collar dock worker from shipping hub Bayonne, NJ, as the protagonist. The film focuses on working people trying to survive rather than people of higher social standing, such as politicians or military generals trying to stop the invasion. Spielberg's interest in class issues certainly warrants further study. Racial issues are raised in Lawrence's *I Am Legend*, given that Will Smith is a black hero who confronts enemies who were at one point people themselves, but have now all become a pasty-skinned, genetically homogeneous community. In addition, Will Smith's character becomes a protector figure for Anna Montez, a Brazilian survivor, and Ethan, a white boy. What is the racial subtext of these casting choices? Darabont's *The Mist* also raises issues of race and social class, with Brent Norton as the only black character and (against stereotype) the only affluent city-dweller on screen. He is, for the most part, disliked by the community – but is it for the colour of his skin?

Certain other choices about the depiction of violence are worth further analysis. Why did Spielberg not show dead bodies in the crashed airplane, yet later had numerous corpses floating down a river to terrify Ray's child? What are the inhibitions governing the display of violence in popular sf/horror films post-9/11? In addition, the longevity of these adaptations and the impact they will have on the film industry remain yet to be determined. Also, more work needs to be done to fully grasp the implications of the commercial success of these adaptations in contrast to other films more directly about 9/11, which were not as successful.

War of the Worlds, *I Am Legend*, and *The Mist* are not the only commercially and aesthetically successful sf/horror adaptations to come out post-9/11. Hollywood has repeatedly seen a greater possibility in making a profit by adapting proven commercially successful literary works. Adaptations such as John Hillcoat's *The Road* (2009), James Watkin's *The Woman in Black* (2012), and Tom Tykwer's and Lana and Andy Wachowski's *Cloud Atlas* (2012) have been successfully released in recent years and remakes of *The Day of the Triffids* (Humphries-Brooks) and Paul McGuigan's *Frankenstein* (McClintock) are to be released in the near future. While I cannot suggest that these films are directly related to 9/11, the continued appearance of adaptations appear to suggest that the American audience still responds to the appeal of films adapted from literary works that wed a familiar narrative with a contemporary context to help them better comprehend their world.

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